

In the Father's House

«As we have been united
in the profession of the faith,
so let us keep ourselves united
in suffrage and intercession».
(Fr. Alberione)



On the morning of 9 January 2021, our brother priest died in the “Nuestra Señora de América” hospital in Madrid due to a heart attack

FATHER FRANCISCO JULIO ANTA OVELAR

85 years, 74 of Pauline life, 67 of profession and 61 of ordination

Hospitalized for a few days in the clinic due to constantly worsening renal and cardiac health conditions, Father Anta passed away the day after his 85th birthday.

Father Francisco was born on 8 January 1936 in the small village of Rioconejos, in the province of Zamora, autonomous community of Castilla-León, into a farming family consisting of father Elías, mother Maximina and four other brothers and sisters. He entered the Society of Saint Paul – precisely in the community of Bilbao – on 31 May 1946. He then moved to the house in Zalla (Biscaglia). Here, after finishing his secondary studies, he attended the novitiate that ended with his first profession on 8 September 1953, in which he took the religious name of Julio. The formators, recognizing in him strong intellectual qualities from the beginning, encouraged him, once he finished his studies in philosophy, to move to Rome, where he first completed his theological studies and then obtained a licentiate in philosophy at the Gregorian Pontifical University. In the Eternal City on 8 September 1957, he consecrated himself in perpetuity to the Lord and, on 5 July 1959, he received priestly ordination by the imposition of the hands of Mons. Luigi Traglia.

It is extremely significant that Father Anta left us at the beginning of the Biblical Year of the Pauline Family. In fact, since September 1988, the considerable development that the Pauline biblical apostolate has experienced in Latin America, in many French-speaking countries and even in China and Russia, is linked to him. In that year, the then Superior General Father Renato Perino appointed him, in fact, Director General of the *International Catholic Biblical Society* (SOBICAIN) after a few months earlier, when at a meeting in Rome of some Paulines unanimously asked for the relaunch of that organization. SOBICAIN – which, born in Alba in 1924, obtained pontifical recognition in 1960 and became operational only, in fact, starting from the end of the 1980s – is one of the most successful expressions of our biblical apostolate, an apostolic fundamental direction that Father Alberione cultivated and encouraged since 1923 with a series of initiatives (“The Gospel in every family”, “The one-lire Gospel”, just to mention the very first projects), but which he then found in the following decades an immense expansion around the world.

Father Francisco carried out this demanding assignment from the operational headquarters in Madrid until 2017, thanks to his undoubted managerial skills and the skills in the publishing field that he developed in previous years, especially as a missionary in Argentina, but he was also helped by a very strong character that, while creating some misunderstanding and conflict, allowed him to carry out practically alone the difficult mission entrusted to him. Over many years, he has

successfully promoted numerous editions of the Bible in various languages, dealing with the printing and distribution of many millions of copies in various countries of the world, especially in Latin America and even, as mentioned, in China and Russia. To achieve these goals, he has made many trips to various countries and has established fruitful relationships with Bishops, biblical scholars and publishers, always having at heart the spread of the Bible.

In his life, as mentioned, the missionary experience in Argentina was very important, to which he was destined in 1961, immediately after his ordination. In Buenos Aires, he held various positions: professor of philosophy (1961-1965), master of aspirants (1962-65) and juniors (1965-67), head of the printing press (1963-73), director of the Buenos Aires bookshop (1965-66). Father Francisco always remembered with great affection this long and fruitful experience, lived moreover in very critical years on a political and social level.

Having completed his missionary experience in South America, in 1973, he returned to Spain, where he lived the rest of his life giving himself body and soul to the Pauline life and mission. He immediately took over the direction of the newly founded Pauline publishing centre for two years, before holding the office of Provincial Superior for two terms – until 1984. During these years he was able to interpret well the guidelines received from the Superior General of the time, Father Renato Perino, which so deeply characterized that historical period of our Congregation towards a greater professionalization of the Pauline apostolate and a precise distinction between the spheres of community life and those of apostolic organization, principles which were then extended, from the beginning of the 1990s, to the whole Congregation. Finally, in the following provincial mandate, he held the position of circumscription Bursar.

In recent years, when he was reminded of the many efforts, activities and concerns that he offered throughout his life to the biblical apostolate, Father Francisco used to say: *«It was the Lord who did it, I was just a useless servant»*. Looking with joyful admiration at his apostolic passion, we can confidently entrust to the divine mercy the whole life of this brother of ours, who, we believe, can well say in unison with the Apostle: *«I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith!»*.

Rome, 10 January 2021



Father Stefano Stimamiglio, ssp
Secretary General

As soon as possible, Father Francisco's remains will be cremated. The ashes will then be delivered to the family and, after the funeral, will be buried in the cemetery of his birthplace, Rioconejos. The local Pauline community will celebrate a Mass in suffrage of his soul as soon as possible.

The Superiors of Circumscriptions are to inform their communities for the suffrages prescribed (Const. 65 and 65.1).