

Father Francesco Avi

1934-2020



Francesco Avi was born on 3 August 1934 in Vigo di Baselga Pinè (TN) to his parents Giovanni Avi and his mother Caterina Giovannini. On 5 October 1945 he entered the Camillian seminary of Villa Visconta in Besana Brianza (MB). On 7 September 1950 he began his novitiate in Verona at the religious house of San Giuliano under the esteemed guidance of Father Gigliano, a pathway that ended with his temporary religious profession on 8 September 1951. On 16 July he obtained his school-leaving certificate from the *Istituto Maffei* of Verona. He then began his studies in theology at the major seminary of Mottinello in Rossano Veneto (VI). At that seminary, on 1 April 1956, he made his perpetual profession. On 8 December 1958 he was ordained a deacon by Msgr. Gerolamo Bortignon, the Bishop of Padua, and on 21 June 1959 he was ordained a priest by the same prelate.

On 18 July 1959 his Superiors sent him to the hospital of Padua to act as a substitute but in November he enrolled at the University of Medicine with a view to going to a mission, where Father Antonelli was keenly awaiting his arrival, and went as an assistant to the nascent Parish of St. Camillus in Padua. In the middle of July 1962 he went to England for three months to learn English. On 30 November 1965 he was awarded a degree in medicine and surgery by the University of Padua.

On 17 June 1966 he could finally leave for the Island of Taiwan (called at that time the Island of Formosa) and on 6 July he was already working at the hospital of Lotung as an assistant surgeon (taking the place of Fr. Antonelli who had been diagnosed as having a tumour). When he first returned to Italy at the end of 1970 for a holiday this was an opportunity for him to practise medicine at the Hospital of San Bonifacio (VR). On 17 March 1972 he returned to Taiwan. After a period learning Chinese at Hsinchu, on 2 July 1972 he went to Makung on the Pescadores Islands as a medical doctor and the director of the St. Camillus Hospital. On 3 May 1974 he also became the Superior of the local community.

On 30 July 1976 he was moved to the Hospital of Tabaka in Kenya, an African mission that had just been begun by the Order, a century after the experience of the Camillians who had followed St. Daniel Comboni. In the middle of August of that year Fr. Francesco was already performing small operations. He stayed there until May 1977.

In August 1977 he was appointed the Superior and director of the Hospital of Makung and he was re-appointed to both these positions in 1980. During his holidays in Italy in August 1984 he engaged in a work placement for a month at the Hospital of Borgo Roma in Verona. In October 1984 he was moved to St. Mary's Hospital in Lotung where he practised medicine and worked with TAC. In the meantime he studied Chinese at Taipei.

On 26 April 1986 he once again obeyed his Superiors and moved to the Hospital of Tabaka in Kenya as a medical doctor. After thirteen years (on 29 September 1999) he asked to be placed permanently in the Camillian Province of Lombardy and Veneto, and more specifically as a part of the Delegation of Kenya, being removed completely *de iure* from the Camillian Province of the Far East. His request was granted and on 14 September he was appointed the financial administrator of the community of Tabaka.

In 2017, because of increasing health problems, he returned to Italy and completed his religious life at the community of Cremona where he exercised a little priestly ministry in the church and the wards.

A priest, a missionary and a medical doctor, Father Francesco was a Camillian with 'a stole and a scalpel'. This is how he was defined on the sixtieth anniversary of becoming of a priest on the occasion of the feast day of Our Lady of Health of last November. Father Francesco in his spirit and

his psychology remained a man of the mountains: he did not look for applause, indeed he was shy about putting himself forward. He did not love long disquisitions or extensive talks; he was rather reserved and it was not easy for him to express himself in Chinese. But he was dedicated to his service of being a medical doctor and he did this in an admirable way both because of his patience towards patients and how he accompanied them, and because of his constant presence, as a result of which he managed to obtain excellent cooperation from the nursing staff who still today remember him with admiration.