



Amato Michele (self-portrait)

Brief Biography

The young couple and the hope of a new life:

Amato Michele, born in Bari on December 12, 1955, initially appeared to be a normal child. He was baptized on January 1, 1956, in the crypt of the Basilica of Saint Nicholas. The son of a young couple married after World War II, he grew up in a family environment characterized by solid values and inspired by the hope of rebuilding and growth. His parents noticed the first signs of hearing problems, and his deafness was diagnosed around the age of three



Pietro Amato (born 1928) and Giovanna Sanna (born 1932)

So, speaking of my childhood, I lived with my parents, who were cared for by my grandfather, Michele Gennaro Nicola (born in 1888), in the house located at Via Melo 218 in Bari. One day, my parents decided to enroll me in the nursery school run by the Capuchin friars of the parish of Sant'Antonio da Padova.



Parrocchia Sant'Antonio da Padova di Bari

One day, my parents dropped me off in the nursery school room, where the other children were. I hung my coat on the coat rack on the wall, at the height of the children, and placed my lunch basket on the nearby bench.

At a certain point, a friar entered the room and called for all the children to leave for the courtyard. However, I remained still in front of the wall, not having heard the call, and was left alone in the room. I felt frightened and began to wander around the large hall.

Suddenly, I saw an elderly Capuchin friar with a long white beard coming down the stairs. He looked me in the eye and asked my name. I was unable to respond. At that moment, the friar realized I was deaf and immediately called my parents to inform them. At the suggestion of the ENT specialist, my parents decided to enroll me, starting in 1959, in the specialized school for the deaf at the "Lorenzo Apicella" Provincial Institute in Molfetta.



After entering the institute, I remained as a boarding student. Later, my little sister, also deaf, came. My parents came to visit us at least every Sunday, especially since I suffered greatly during those years from being separated from my loved ones.

In boarding school, the deaf practiced a communication dynamic similar to that which develops when using appropriate forms of expression. Each communicator appropriates these forms in the exercise of speech, referring to themselves, defining themselves as "I" and the other as "you."

appropriate linguistic forms or symbols, and therefore struggle to establish itself as a subject.

Sign language, learned by deaf people, is not always used as the primary language of communication and rarely evolves into a true language, which is the fundamental means of conveying feelings, ideas, and intentions.

Claiming one's ability to communicate through gesture implies knowledge of the significant signs of sign language, but this does not mean possessing complete mastery of gestural communication. Once learned to "sign," anyone can convey the meaning of a given gesture, but this often remains an isolated sign, lacking the linguistic context necessary for a complete expression.



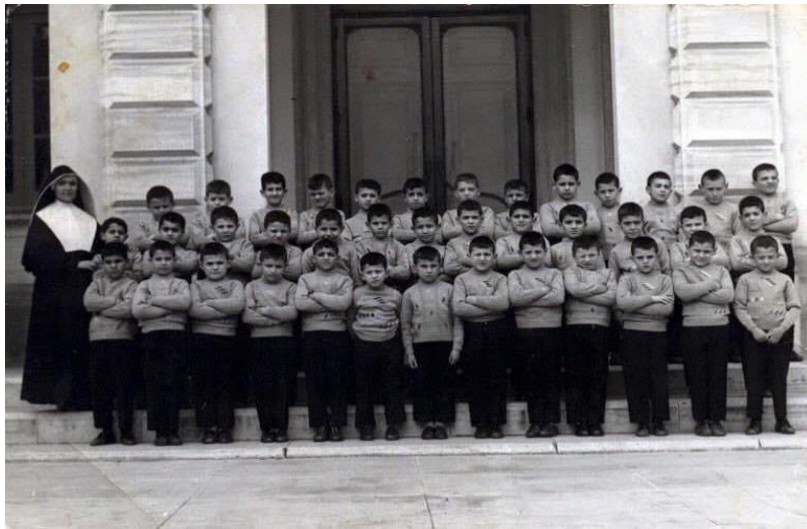
In school, deaf students may encounter difficulties composing a written sentence due to a lack of adaptation to the dynamic linguistic conditions inherent to hearing communication. Indeed, hearing people speak differently than they write. If we write down spoken words verbatim, we notice that they follow a tortuous pattern, a mode of thought transmission that often leaves us confused and disoriented: in other words, we lose the thread of the conversation.

This happens because the spoken word is immediate and spontaneous, while the written word requires an overall vision and overall coherence. By writing, we are able to correct and reformulate our thoughts; by speaking, however, this is more difficult.

However, simplifying verbal sentences can facilitate greater comprehension on the part of the interlocutor, especially when the speaker uses symbols shared with the recipient. Deaf people, however, do not possess the same basic verbal grammatical scheme as hearing people.

From childhood, children may find themselves psychologically dependent on a significant figure (mother, sibling, speech therapist, teacher, etc.), to the point of identifying that person with verbal language itself. If they learn through such guidance, they may believe they can bridge the divide between the deaf and hearing worlds.

Many proponents of oralism reject the use of sign language, precisely because they exploit this dependence to encourage them to become "speaking." They see sign language as an obstacle to their educational practice, which is based on the exclusive use of spoken language, as established by the Second International Congress on the Education of the Deaf, held in Milan in 1880.



Educators, in the school and socio-pedagogical fields, play a fundamental role, just as we, the hearing impaired, do as interlocutors and language re-educators. But how can a deaf person correctly perceive the dynamics of the speech organs—in their resonance, vibration, and articulation—if they cannot hear their sound?

Hearing aids did not exist in the past. Attempting to reproduce, through transparent plastic materials, the dynamic (even if not audible) phenomena of the speech organs would mean being able to say to the deaf person: "Look at the back of your tongue: it touches the middle of the palate. Now, a strong respiratory emission makes space between the tongue and the palate to exit freely; the tongue returns to its resting state, thus producing the consonantal phenomenon called 'C,' as in **Dog**."

In order to achieve the best possible results in what is common to the norm of linguistic articulation, no auxiliary means, provided they are valid and consciously used, should be overlooked by those who delve into the science and practice of spoken language re-education. I genitori.

It often happens that many hearing parents, driven by the desire to make their deaf child speak, deprive them of access to Italian sign language. However, various scientific studies have shown that a deaf child learns better through sign language. This also applies to all children with normal hearing, especially in the early years of life, when they still don't speak and communicate spontaneously through body language and gestures.

This doesn't mean that by using sign language, they will never speak. This is why it's necessary to overcome this prejudice from the outside world and break down communication barriers.

Today, speech therapy courses exist, which weren't available in my day, and so many deaf people today are able to speak well. Hearing aids weren't available when I was a child either; only recently—now in my sixties—have I started wearing them, out of obligation, following my university degree in Theology. I use them to be able to follow at least some of the professor's voice during class.

Even with this delay in using prosthetics and IT tools, I felt the need to achieve some goals I had set for myself, and I was happy to be able to do so.

After six years of hard work and great sacrifice, I managed to earn my Bachelor's degree.

Here is my journey of faith in life:

However, it's fitting now to recall a significant encounter with Father Tommaso Tridente, a Catholic religion teacher. I was 11 years old when, during a lesson, he entered the room and approached me to ask if I wanted to participate in the First Communion preparation program. He addressed me with these words:

"Is it true that you desire to love Jesus?"

Seeing my confident response, he smiled and explained to the teacher that he had come to suggest I take catechism classes, with the aim of preparing me for First Communion.



That moment marked the beginning of an important journey of faith in my life.



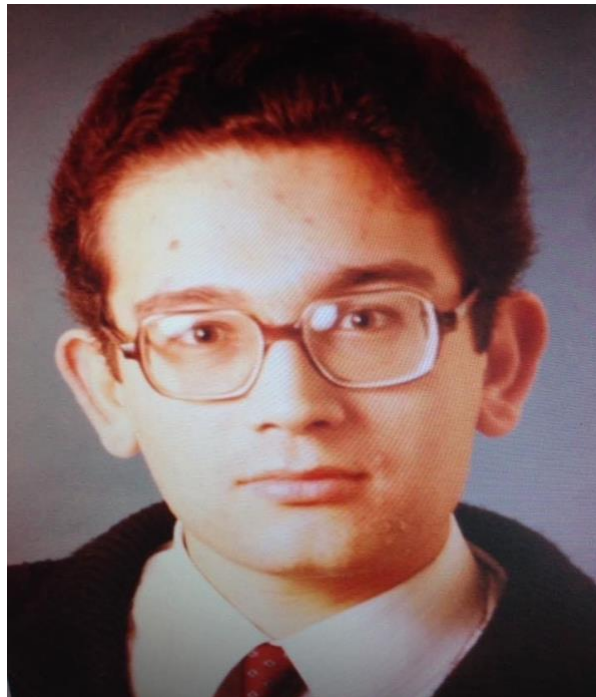
In the front row, in the large courtyard of the "Lorenzo Apicella" Institute in Molfetta, on May 29, 1966: on the right, Father Tommaso Tridente, in the center, Bishop Salvucci Achille, and on the left, the writer, receiving a pat on the shoulder from the catechism leader. Later, on December 22, 1966, I received the sacrament of Confirmation during a liturgical celebration presided over by the same bishop.

One day, after I graduated from high school with a degree in business and accounting, a young deaf man—a former catechism classmate—came to my parents' house, where they had moved to Viale Orazio Flacco 23/C in Bari, to meet me.

His intention was to read and interpret some passages from his Bible, since he had become a Jehovah's Witness. However, we didn't have a copy of that book in our house. At that point, my father chased him away, considering his attitude intrusive and disrespectful towards the Catholic faith.

After that incident, I went to get a CEI Bible from Paoline. For my name day, my father gave me a sculpture-painting of Saint Michael, which I hung on the wall near my bed. Every night I read the Bible, page after page. It was a time of reflection and deep interest in the testimony to God's existence in Israel's history. My doubts vanished when I began reading about the coming of Jesus, called Christ, who came to earth to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Sometimes, after reading, I suffered from nightmares accompanied by sleep paralysis, which I attributed to demonic influence. At those times, I prayed, invoking the name of Jesus. One particular night, I had a vision in which I felt the penetrating gaze of Jesus searching my heart: because of a sin that was displeasing to Him, He averted His gaze. But Mary saw everything and prayed to her Son to help me understand my ignorance. After this nocturnal vision, I got up and immediately went to confession, longing to find peace in my heart



When I came to the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, I read chapter 2, verses 17-18, in which Peter, struck by Pentecost, said: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions..." While I was sleeping, I had a vision: I saw a distant mountain that seemed to touch the sky. I approached and noticed that, all around the mountain, there were numerous churches in Purgatory. A boy with a smiling face, dressed in a white robe, appeared and invited me to play tag. We ran together, passing in front of two doors: he always entered through the one on the right. The chase repeated itself several times, and each time the boy chose the door on the right. Finally, he disappeared, and I, facing other doors, also entered through the one on the right. Unaware that it was the last door, once I opened it, I found myself in a marvelous garden, illuminated by a crystalline sky and bright, gentle, and pleasant flashes of light. I was filled with great joy, while a celestial melody filled the entire atmosphere. I approached and met a radiant, beautiful young man, surrounded by an aura of light. He wore a white tunic with snow-colored lace. In his left hand, he held a chalice, while with his right he distributed the host to those lined up, ready to receive communion. From up close, I could contemplate his radiant face: his gaze was turned upward, and on his face I could clearly see a luminous smile, accompanied by a beautiful voice that resonated like the laughter of "happy children."

Suddenly, a darkness enveloped me, and I felt drawn and drawn toward an "earthly" destination. When I awoke, I felt a pang in my heart. I was perplexed and began to reflect on the meaning of that vision, which prompted me to bear witness to it, attributing its effect to the prophecy of Peter, fulfilled by the Holy Spirit, the current guardian of the Catholic Church. For a long time, I could not fully understand the feeling left by that experience



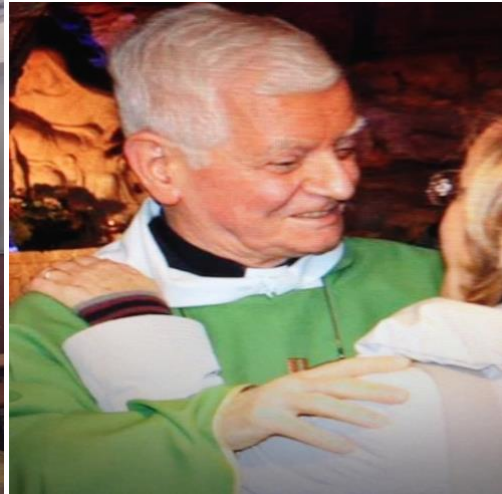
Former parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Bari during the management of parish priest Nicola Bollino.

One day, a Sunday in spring, early in the morning, I attended Holy Mass at the parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, near the Polyclinic of Bari. I followed the liturgy celebrated by the parish priest Nicola Bollino and, not being able to hear, I limited

myself to read the missal, where the passage from the Gospel according to John was reported (13,34): "I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." From this commandment he underlined the importance of love and harmony among Christians, in the unity of Love.



The interior of the church where the vision appeared.



The parish priest Nicola Bollino is responsible for the parish.

At the time of the distribution of the Eucharist, I approached the line to receive Communion. I saw the parish priest up close, who in my eyes transformed into the person of Jesus, who was preparing to drive out evil from each person. When Jesus looked at me with a moving gaze, without uttering a word, I prostrated myself to kiss his feet. At that moment, my vision opened and I saw myself receiving the Host in my mouth. Even though I saw the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, I tried in vain to understand how a mortal, an insignificant person like me, could witness such a vision. However, no one seems to want to believe my testimony.

The first signs of my journey of faith.

Place of work:

One day, I was hired by the bank and sent to the tailor appointed by my employer (at the time, the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura di Bari) to make a custom suit. When I arrived at the workshop, the tailor immediately began taking my measurements. As he measured the length of my arms, he lowered his head to better inspect the sleeve, while I was lost in thought: "After that vision... why?"

At a certain point, the tailor looked up and asked me, "Where is the wedding ring I noticed on your finger a moment ago?" I replied that I was single. I, too, began to wonder if this was a prophetic sign tied to my destiny. After a few years, the deaf woman Girolmina from Molfetta and I met and decided to be engaged for two years.

A particular case to forget:

One day, some friends of my sister Nicoletta came to my parents' house. Their parents allowed them to hold a séance to try to communicate with their deceased loved ones. I objected, pointing out the biblical prohibition on such practices, but they insisted, confirming their decision.

I then retreated to another room, away from them, and immersed myself in prayer, turning to the heavens through the veranda window.

Meanwhile, I saw an entity wandering around: a specter resembling a floating octopus, each tentacle bearing a small eye. As it approached, it seemed frightened at the sight of me and instantly disappeared.

After that sacrilegious séance, there was a sudden interruption. My sister Nicoletta ran to me, apologizing. She confessed that, during the séance, someone had said that the spirit of the apostle Peter was present in that house.

I severely rebuked my family, who were visibly shaken by what had happened. They promised never to perform a séance again.

I primi amici della comunità dell'Opus Dei:

It was around that time that my brother Emanuele introduced me to his friends and to the spiritual director, Don Ugo, of Opus Dei, whose center was located on Via Roberto da Bari. Among his hearing friends, one person who particularly struck me was Dr. Diego Perrone, an ophthalmologist at ASL BA04, who impressed me with his intelligence and theological preparation. During one of our meetings, he told me that the Lord has a personal plan for each of us. He cited a passage from Scripture in this regard: "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people does not understand" (cf. Is 1:3). This demonstrates that every vocation is profoundly personal.

One day we set out on a trip organized by Don Ugo, with the intention of visiting the tomb of the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá, located in Rome. During the bus ride, my friend Diego asked me if I had ever received a sign from God. I replied that I hadn't yet received such a calling, because, in my case, I am aware of my limitations and, without His divine permission, I wouldn't know how to carry out a project that, in my eyes, seems impossible.

Before we got married, I asked for the blessing of Opus Dei, of my friend Diego, and of several people—such as Father Ugo and the deaf Oblate Letizia Greco—so that every expectation might be fulfilled in God's grace. After our marriage in 1983, my friend Diego was ordained a priest in 1986. My wife and I moved from Bari to Molfetta, to the house owned by my in-laws. Our family gave birth to three daughters, all of whom are also deaf.

The dawn of "hope" has risen in Molfetta:

One day, on May 20, 1990, a gathering of deaf people from across the province of Bari was organized at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Martyrs in Molfetta. The event was promoted by Father Aldo Natali, administrator of the Opera Gualandi. Bishop Antonio Bello of Molfetta also attended. During the gathering, Father Aldo Natali—perhaps by intuition or by free choice—called me to his side, entrusting me with the role of assistant and promoter of this initiative.

The meeting aimed to discuss the possible founding of the Apostolic Movement for the Deaf (M.A.S.) by the dioceses of Puglia. The gathering, led by Father Aldo Natali, included the celebration of Holy Mass in the sanctuary dedicated to the venerated icon of the Madonna. After the Mass, Father Aldo expressed his desire to promote the work of evangelization through the creation of the Apostolic Movement for the Deaf.

A year after the Molfetta gathering, Archbishop Mariano A. Magrassi decided to issue the MAS decree, protocol no. 381/A/91, on May 15, 1991, in favor of the deaf community of Bari. With the approval of this decree, he also appointed Father Vito Spinelli as spiritual assistant of the MAS for the Archdiocese of Bari-Bitonto, also authorizing the use of a space at the Filippo Smaldone Institute in Bari.

Similarly, in Molfetta, the MAS decree protocol no. 78/91 was issued on July 30, 1991 by Bishop Antonio Bello in favor of the local deaf community, appointing Father Franco Abbattista as spiritual assistant of the MAS in the diocese of Molfetta. The responsibility of the M.A.S. group rested with the Archbishop of Bari-Bitonto. It was also automatically entrusted to the President of the Little Mission for the Deaf (P.M.S.) club of the city of Molfetta.



Rally in Molfetta on May 20, 1990

Other signs on my inner journey:

One night, while I was sleeping in my house in Molfetta, a sinister, dark movement appeared to me in a dream, resembling a demon, whose power paralyzed my body. With all my strength, I managed to invoke the name of Jesus several times. Suddenly, a hand reached down from above, grabbed the intruder, and freed me from its claws. Immediately afterward, under a light from above, the image of the sculpture-painting of Saint Michael, forgotten in my parents' house, appeared to me, and I heard a voice say to me: "Protection will be near you if you place this in your home."

The supernatural event occurred on February 11, 1999, during a period of illness while I was undergoing hospital checks for a problem with my right meniscus. At that time, I was granted, indeed, a divine encounter. Lying on the bed and racked by pain, I picked up a book entitled *Terra Santa*, published by the Touring Club Italiano. On page 301, I noticed an illustration depicting the stained-glass windows of the Hadassah Synagogue in Jerusalem. I lingered in particular on one of them: it depicted a dove with an olive branch in its beak, set among various shapes and vibrant colors.

Suddenly, just as I was gazing at that image, the face of the Lord appeared to me. He had a perfect human appearance, with a well-groomed beard and combed hair, and a regal bearing. He approached, his gaze fixed on me: his eyes were enchanting, luminous, deep, almost magnetic, accompanied by an empathetic and encouraging expression. We exchanged only a glance, without uttering a word. I noticed that, behind him, some women were dancing in a field, enveloped in the scent of wheat: it seemed like a harvest festival. Perhaps it was a celebration linked to the Jewish month of Adar, like the holiday of Shavuot.

Or perhaps he was trying to make me understand the meaning of the harvest mentioned in the Gospel of John:

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields; they are already white for harvest..." (John 4:35). After comforting me, his face slowly faded from my sight.

After moving to Bari: facing the unknown in God's will:

At the end of the 20th century, I moved permanently to Bari with my entire family. Subsequently, on May 15, 2004, Father Vito and Knight Francesco Manzari, national councilor of the Apostolic Movement for the Deaf, organized a meeting to elect the board of directors of the Bari M.A.S. group, which was held in the reception room of the "Filippo Smaldone" Pastoral Center in Carbonara.

When the candidates, including myself, were presented, something unexpected happened: without hesitation, my daughter—then still a child—took me by the hand, spontaneously, and led me to Father Vito Spinelli, spiritual assistant of the MAS of the diocese of Bari, who welcomed me and accepted my candidacy. I asked her why she had insisted I run, and the little girl replied firmly: "You must! You must!" At that moment, I realized I had to face the unknown. I agreed, convinced that I probably wouldn't be elected. Instead, to my surprise, I was elected and appointed president, with a large majority of votes, supported by councilors Vito Manzari and Grazia Fiorentino; the role of secretary was entrusted to Leonardo Dambra.

After the election, a letter of appointment from the new MAS board of directors was sent to Father Vito Spinelli, spiritual assistant, to His Excellency Archbishop Francesco Cacucci of Bari-Bitonto, and Cavalier Libero Marinato, President of the National Committee of the MAS in Pordenone. For the first time, I had official minutes and letters compiled in a dedicated collection of documents, which was then stored in a closet at the "Filippo Smaldone" Pastoral Center, with Sister Mafalda's consent



Centro Pastorale Filippo Smaldone di Bari Carbonara

One day, during my office hours, in September 2005, another vision appeared to me when I was 50 years old. It was in the office of the former Banca Antonveneta (now Monte dei Paschi di Siena on Viale della Repubblica), where I was carrying out my duties in the hall, in contact with the public, between the cash register and the underground vault. Meanwhile, I had a divine manifestation while I was gazing at a mountain, like the one I had once dreamed. In that vision, I heard talk of enrolling in Theology, encouraging me to follow an arduous path to reach that inaccessible summit. I asked if it were possible to begin as soon as I could retire, and received His approval. I reflected on the vision I had seen with my naked eyes, but I was unable to

fully grasp its purpose. In the Gospel, it reminded me of Jesus' call to Matthew during his time as a tax collector.



When my employer sent the collective redundancy letter to several eligible Monte dei Paschi di Siena employees, including me, they asked me to honor the union agreement that provided for early retirement, scheduled for the end of September 2014. At that moment, remembering the vision that had inspired me, I contacted the office of the "Santa Fara" Theological Institute in Bari, run by Father Luigi Orlando, OFM (Order of Friars Minor), director of the Apulian Theological Faculty, to enroll in the faculty. The instructor, Father Patrizio Missere, advised me to initially enroll as an auditor in the Sacred Scripture course for a year; then, if successful, they could discuss my subsequent enrollment as a full student, where Father Luigi Orlando, the director, welcomed me into the faculty. So, after passing the Sacred Scripture exam with top marks and honors, I enrolled in the Theology course in the 2015/2016 academic year. What mattered was the profile of a deaf person, confident in God's plan. I obtained the Bachelor's degree in Sacred Scripture on July 14, 2021.

