

Walking the Immanuel Way

The Spiritual Vision and Life Praxis of Rev. Fr. J. E. Arul Raj in Today's World

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Abstract

In contemporary Christian missiology, spirituality is increasingly recognized not as a static doctrine, but as a dynamic, lived process. Grounded in the vision of Rev. Fr. J. E. Arul Raj, founder of the Society of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI) and the Clerical Society of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (MMI), *Immanuel Spirituality* represents a profound synthesis of Christological obedience, contemplation-in-action, and holistic human growth. This paper explores Fr. Arul Raj's core teachings on "growing in Immanuel Spirituality"—analyzing its imperative for daily dynamic transformation, its relational model of obedience (*Abba* Father), its foundational virtues (Simplicity, Generosity, and Magnanimity), and its trajectory toward fourfold mystical union with God, self, others, and creation.

Key words: Immanuel, Three Pillars, Spirituality. God and Contemplation.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual life, according to Rev. Fr. J. E. Arul Raj, operates in a continuous present tense. Growth is not an automatic consequence of advancing age or institutional status; rather, it is a conscious, dynamic orientation of the heart that requires daily intentionality (Arul Raj 2021, 15). Rooted in the Pauline exhortation to "*keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become strong in your faith*" (Col 2:7), growing in Immanuel Spirituality demands a move away from passive routine.

In every moment, human life presents three distinct possibilities: to learn and mature, to stagnate in mediocrity, or to regress. To avoid spiritual stagnation, Fr. Arul Raj asserts that one must live consciously—recognizing that true growth is measured not by age, but by transformed motivation and active love. Fr. Arul quotes in his book titled *foundations of spirituality* that God worries more about how you do it more than what you do. Everybody has many things to do in life, how it is being done is most analytical question to ponder, as Bible says it has to be done cheerfully, for God loves the cheerful giver. (Arul Raj 2019, 78)

2. IMMANUEL AS THE MEETING POINT: THE THREE PILLARS

At its theological core, Immanuel Spirituality is the spirituality of Jesus Himself—the divine meeting point between God's holiness and humanity's brokenness. It imitates Christ who manifested the Father's love through His self-emptying and passion. This Christological paradigm is structured upon three central pillars:

1. **Simplicity:** Transparency in lifestyle and attitude, stripping away pretends and remaining accessible to all.
2. **Generosity:** Selfless service offered without mercenary motives, rooted in the sacrificial sharing of one's life and resources.

3. **Magnanimity:** Greatness of soul expressed through total obedience to God, radical forgiveness of enemies, and the persistent building up of community (Arul Raj 2021, 38).

These pillars invite believers to pay special reverence to God the Father (*Abba*), echoing the divine longing expressed in Scripture: *"I thought you would call me Father"* (Jer 3:19) and the call to inner stillness: *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Ps 46:10).

3. THE THEOLOGY OF OBEDIENCE: RELATIONSHIP, TRUST, AND SURRENDER

For Fr. Arul Raj, obedience is the undisputed hallmark of religious and Christian life. Citing Jesus' declaration, *"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me"* (John 6:38), he emphasizes that every disciple is sent for one single purpose: pleasing the Father (John 8:29). True obedience is never forced legalism; rather, it consists of four interconnected dimensions:

- **Obedience as Relationship:** Modeled on Jesus' intimate communion with the Father through prayer, which fostered the deep communication necessary for alignment (John 13:15).
- **Obedience as an Act of Trust:** Flowing directly from love, for love expresses itself by keeping divine commands (John 14:15, 31).
- **Obedience as an Act of Faith:** Serving as the visible, concrete proof of inner belief.
- **Obedience as Free Choice and Self-Denial:** A voluntary surrender of personal ego, opinions, and societal pressure to embrace God's mission.

THE METAPHOR OF DEVOTION (*BHAKTI*)

To clarify the nature of active obedience, Fr. Arul Raj utilizes the classical Indian theological triad of *Bhakti* (devotion):

School	Analogy	Dynamics of Devotion	Spiritual Suitability
Markata Bhakti	The Baby Monkey	Clings passively to the mother for safety.	Incomplete: Relies solely on human effort.
Marjara Bhakti	The Kitten	Carried helplessly by the mother from place to place.	Incomplete: Overemphasizes passive dependence.
Kukkuta Bhakti	The Hen and Chicks	The mother guides, but the chicks actively forage and work.	Ideal Model: Balances God's grace with human responsibility.

In the Immanuel way, believers are called to the model of the hen (*Kukkuta Bhakti*): God performs what is divine, while the disciple actively fulfills their duty in freedom and cooperation. (Appasamy 1942, 115–122).

4. IDENTITY IN THE EYE OF GOD: MOVING BEYOND EXTERIOR JUDGMENT

A central theme in Fr. Arul Raj's formation is the distinction between human perception and divine revelation. Throughout salvation history, human eyes saw limitations where God saw divine destiny:

- Human society saw a barren woman in Sarah; God saw the mother of nations (Gen 17:15–16).
- Society saw a young, forgotten shepherd in David; God saw the anointed king of Israel (1 Sam 16:7).
- Society saw a helpless prisoner in Joseph; God saw a ruler who would save nations (Gen 41:39–41).

Disciples of Immanuel Spirituality must ground their worth not in the opinions of peers, superiors, or society, but in their essential identity before God. While physical, material, and intellectual capacities change, the true identity resides in the soul: *"I am divine; I am a child of God."* As Fr. Arul Raj summarizes in Tamil: *"நான் ஒன்றும் இல்லை, எல்லாம் அவனாக இருக்கும் போது"* ("I am nothing, when He is everything").

5. PRACTICAL SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Growth in Immanuel Spirituality manifests in concrete daily disciplines. Fr. Arul Raj outlines six operational signs of a maturing disciple:

- 1. Be a Person of Prayer & Scripture (Daily grounding in the Word)
- 2. Speak Less, Do More (Letting results testify before plans are spoken)
- 3. Listen Intentionally (Listening with purpose to learn and grow)
- 4. React Less, Respond Calmly (Disciplining emotions under pressure)
- 5. Observe Closely (Understanding what works to make wise decisions)
- 6. Read Continuously (Cultivating the mind for effective leadership)

6. CONTEMPLATION AND THE FOURFOLD UNION WITH GOD

The ultimate trajectory of Immanuel Spirituality is contemplative union. Fr. Arul Raj teaches that a life unreflected is a life unlived. Contemplation is the intentional development of awareness—becoming conscious of God's abiding presence everywhere. This inner illumination, akin to scriptural promises of entering the Kingdom of God, culminates in a holistic, fourfold union:

1. **Union with Self:** Realized through breath awareness and meditation, leading to self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and healthy self-love.
2. **Union with Others:** Flowing naturally from self-acceptance into empathetic community life.

3. **Union with Nature:** Recognizing creation as a reflection of the Creator, driving active environmental stewardship.
4. **Union with God:** The supreme culmination where the soul experiences divine oneness and peace (Arul Raj 2021, 112).

7. CONCLUSION: BECOMING A PERSON OF VALUE

Echoing Albert Einstein's famous maxims—"I have no special talent, I am only passionately curious" and "Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value" (EMPERY QUOTES). —Rev. Fr. J. E. Arul Raj calls contemporary believers to redefine their life's purpose. Walking the Immanuel way in today's world means anchoring oneself in true spiritual identity, living out the pillars of **Simplicity, Generosity, and Magnanimity**, and transforming daily work into an instrument of God's abiding presence.

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