**Learning Together # 1: (Christian) Spirituality**

In the last unit of resource material on this principle, I outlined 6 views of spirituality and gave you the opportunity to reflect on your understanding of spirituality, how it might help us to achieve our goals in Poatina, and how your understanding of spirituality might be expressed both personally and corporately. In this unit, we’ll reflect more explicitly on the distinctives of Christian Spirituality and the implications of them on our corporate and individual lives in Poatina. In the next unit we’ll explore how our spirituality is maintained.

**What is Christian Spirituality?**

Sandra Schneiders believes that spirituality “orients [a person to something] beyond purely private satisfaction toward the ultimate good, the highest value, that the person recognizes, which may be God but might also be something other than God… the ultimate value functions as a horizon luring the person toward growth.” Schneiders, Sandra M. *Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality*, IN: The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality; Arthur Holder (Ed); Oxford, 2005 p 17

It stands to reason, I think, that the ultimate value you aspire to will influence the ways in which you grow. The characteristics of the god you seek to connect with, follow or worship will influence the ways in which you grow, either consciously or unconsciously.

For instance, those who follow Mohammed or Buddha or Jesus Christ, those who quest after material possessions; those who worship YHWH, the spirits of their ancestors or the natural world around them all produce very different cultures (“shared symbols of meaning”) and ways of living together.

Perhaps more subtlety, those who share a similar way of seeing and responding to the world (e.g. a more rigid, fundamentalist, rules driven outlook or a less rigid, more relativist, more permissive outlook) might have more in common with those who share their outlook on life than those who might identify with a particular religion.

I, Bruce, think that there are some characteristics of the Christian faith which have consciously, or subconsciously shaped our vision (expressed in Poatina on a Page); influence the kind of life we aspire to here; and have implications for the way in which we do life together. You may, obviously, agree or disagree! Maybe that’s something we can explore in our up-coming Gatherings☺. But here they are:

1. **The Trinity:**

Like many things about God in the Christian faith (I can’t speak for other faiths!), this understanding of God is beyond my comprehension. But the implications of a belief in the Trinitarian nature of God (one Being in three persons); and the fruits of such a belief, are obvious and tangible. This belief asserts that at the core and centre of life in our universe there is a community that embodies **love** (the technical word is *agape*), **appropriate delegation, authority and responsibility**, (again, the technical word is *subsidiarity*) **mutual respect** for individuality, and is a model of **unity** (or *solidarity*).

It follows then, that a village for whom Christian spirituality is its most important guiding principle will strive to embody those attributes of the Christian, Trinitarian God that I’ve put in bold type in the preceding paragraph, along with other attributes, some of which appear in our list of principle that we think are important (like e.g. Hospitality, generosity, creativity, people matter, etc.).

1. **Forgiveness:**

Another mystery! Peter Campbell, the Aussie Christian song writer, in writing about the crucifixion of Jesus, penned the memorable words “no other God has wounds.”

Christians believe that God completely and utterly forgives our wrongdoing, our failures, stuff ups, mistakes and evil inclinations (again the technical word is sin and its synonyms trespasses and iniquity). This is not dependent on anything we do, but is a free and unequivocal gift given to all who truly seek it. Where cultures and communities (be they families, churches or neighbourhoods) have embraced that belief and sought to emulate this characteristic of the Christian God, they look and are experienced as very different from the places where forgiveness is given grudgingly, conditionally or not at all.

1. **The Incarnation:**

This is yet another thing I struggle to understand, but it is one more distinctive of the Christian faith. The belief that Jesus became a human being reinforces his *solidarity* with us, and in a prayer recorded by one of His disciples in John 17, Jesus emphasizes that we can have the same kind of relationship with Him that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy within the Trinity. Cultures in which this attribute is expressed typically work to make things right (as the Christian God does) and do so from an ‘alongside’ position rather than a position of superiority or inferiority. Forgiveness is one expression of this; caring for those in need compassionately and seeking to correct injustice are among other expressions.

**Suggestions for reflection and discussion:**

1. In what ways (if any!) do you think these three attributes of the Christian God have contributed to:
   1. The shape and quality of our life together in Poatina and;
   2. To our shared vision?
2. What attributes have you been on the receiving end of in Poatina? What attributes do you think we do well at? What would you like to celebrate?
3. Which attribute do you find yourself warming to?
4. Which attribute most challenges you?
5. What other attributes do you think are important?
6. Assuming you would, (and you don’t have to!), how would you like to contribute towards improving our expression of these attributes?
   1. Personally?
   2. As a village?
7. What supports do you think you individually, and we corporately, need as we seek to do that?