



## **Between the Two Francises: A Quest for a Space of Harmony in Diversity**

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Pope Francis has brought in fresh energy in the Catholic Church. The intensity of its radiations has reached beyond its visible boundaries. As we celebrate the exposition of St. Francis Xavier in Goa, maybe it is worthwhile to examine how these two great personalities, though living across different times and cultures somehow exhibit some interstices of congruence. Like all Christians these two great persons share a common space in their life of faith in Jesus Christ. It is this imperative of faith that generates profound and dynamic responses of the Christian community to the challenges of their vibrant context in which they find themselves. Therefore, it seems interesting to discern attentively some spaces of congruence that intertwine the faith dynamism of St. Francis Xavier and Pope Francis while being aware that both of them certainly have equivocal, unique and different personality traits as well as context to respond .

Though their times and vivacious contexts are different, without an intention of transmuting them into monocultural sameness, we can make an effort to draw lines that can manifest a common space that might inspire us today. The common space is a perichoretic space, in the model of our triune God where sameness and otherness intermingle without dissolving the otherness into the sameness. The same can be envisaged of these two great human persons and a common terrain of their faith life and leadership can be drawn where their personal uniqueness and charisma admirably merge and inspire us

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today. Hence, our concern is to construct a shared space of harmony in diversity in the life of this great persons and hope that it will ignite our minds and heart to respond authentically to the challenges of our times and build space that will never unhome any one in our society.

As we begin to arrive at a seeing together or synoptic vision that does not draw the curtain on the otherness of these two great persons, we are led to understand that building of such a shared space of harmony in diversity in their respective times and societies was the goal of Francis Xavier as well as the aim of Pope Francis . As we breathe and continue to strive to render a life livable for us and others, we can certainly discern how Pope Francis attempts to incarnate God's welcome,

compassion and mercy to everyone, positively removing the hurdles that unhome several people in the Church and the World at large. His views and witness towards the poor, the oppressed, the gays, the divorced, Vatican Bank, the luxurious life of the leaders in the Church and crass capitalism are known to everyone. In his own way,

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the Pope is creating a shared space of harmony in diversity. This shared space of harmony in diversity, is built on the foundation of humility and compassion of Jesus Christ. In His Book, *Heaven and Earth*, the Pope emphatically says that in our pastoral care, ‘we do not have the right to force anything to anyone. If God in creation ran the risk of making us free, who am I to get involved? (Judge the divorced couples, gay etc)... God left the freedom to sin in our hands.’ The profound life and message of Pope Francis cannot unhome any one and is at once an embodied presence of Gods welcome that became flesh in Jesus Christ to all, particularly the sinners.

St. Francis Xavier, being a Basque exhibits his struggle for the construction of the shared space for the harmony in diversity in his own way. To understand his struggle, we have to abandon the comforting distance of hindsight by which we are often tempted to view him. He belongs to an era when, humanity had not seen the rise of reason, enlightenment, science, technology, secularism,

materialism and consumerism of our days. It was a time when the politics, commerce and religions crossed each other's boundaries and hence, we need critically purify our lens of viewing his life and action. Certainly like every great saint, who exhibit traces of human frailty and divine excellence, Francis too does the same with great distinction. But the fact that his effort became God's welcome can be seen in his heroic life particularly in his shunning aside of his luxuries that came along with him being a Papal nuncio. His leadership is neither bureaucratic nor combative but one that was always alive to the context and sensitive to the vulnerable. His very absence from Goa on long missionary journeys speaks volumes about the way he reached out to the poor and oppressed particularly in South India, where he was most successful among the fisher folks. His struggles against the erring Portuguese officers, erring Church leaders, and the Brahmins, his method of evangelization from the children to the family, his dialogue with the rich and the powerful in Japan and his sheer courage and desire to take up missionary expeditions across the seas and his final unfinished journey to China powerfully manifest how he gave himself up to become God's welcome to the newly discovered people in the East. He felt at home with people of different cultures, languages and religious persuasions and opened himself to dialogue in order to bring about a shared space where diversity can live in harmony.

This shared space of harmony in diversity is not a neutral, flat and numbing space. It is a profoundly political space rooted in God's experience and the lives of the poor and the marginalized. Indeed both the Francis that we tried to understand are men for their times. St. Francis Xavier stood tall and ahead of the men of his time and became the guiding light for generations to

come. Pope Francis is certainly the man for our times. Both in their different ways allow God to work through them and build the Church and humanity. Hence, they continue to inspire tens of thousands to walk in their footsteps and become God's welcome in our families and societies. Channelling God's welcome to humanity afflicted with religious fanaticism, terrorism, economic dispossession, political disenfranchisement etc is both urgent and necessary for the very survival of humanity. We in Goa, with our openness and hospital culture has seeds of God welcome that do not unhomed anyone. Often this seed of God's welcome are abused by the market driven tourism that has de-goanized and unhomed Goans. Hence, St, Francis and Pope Francis are indeed great inspiration for us to build a perichoretic space/ space of harmony in diversity where every shade of otherness is nurtured and valued and is not unhomed or forced to be dissolved into a sameness driven by narcissism. The two great persons that we have attempted to present here challenge us to purge all traces of narcissism in our theologies, moralities, philosophies, economies, and socio-political life. Can we become the liberating presence of God's welcome to each one of us? 🌱



## **The Synod of the Family, Pope Francis and St Francis Xavier**

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The synod of family that took place in Vatican on 5<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October , with the focus on the theme “Pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization” promises to bring about a revolution in the Church’s attitude and ministry to the family. Like Pope Francis, Francis Xavier did put family at the centre of his evangelization, particularly in India. His missiological methodology from the children to the family indicates how family was the locus of his evangelization. Bringing Jesus to the families meant for him bringing happiness to the them. Today, we have increasing number of unhappy families that are breaking apart or threatening to break apart.

That is why the Synod on Family dedicated to the challenges of the family is indeed a moment of Grace for the families. The divorced couples are on an increase, civilly re-married Catholic couples are growing, applications for annulment are growing day by day, co-habiting couples and those in same sex union are on the rise. The Church teaching on marriage, procreation, and family life is steadily losing its hold over the people.