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## From the Editor's Desk [Theological Studies, December 2013]

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## From the Editor's Desk

What wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant,  
what so intoxicating, as possibility!—Kierkegaard

With Pope Francis we have new wine calling for new wineskins—so many “firsts.” First pope to choose the name Francis. The first in centuries to live outside the papal palace. First to give a press conference, and now, with the publication of his interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., on behalf of major Jesuit journals around the world, the first pope to tell the world so much about his interior life, including weaknesses for which he expresses regret. Here is a man who learns from his mistakes and who palpably yearns to grow in holiness, which he associates with patience toward himself and everyone else as well.

Spadaro opens by bluntly asking Francis: “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” He replies, “I am a sinner . . . whom the Lord has looked upon. . . . I am one who is looked upon by the Lord.” He then quotes his papal motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo*. As this is unintelligible without context, I went to its source, Venerable Bede’s *Homilia XXII, in natale Sancti Matthaei Apostoli*. The homily is far too rich to absorb in one sitting, especially when Francis, in his next breath, draws us to share his experience of being called by contemplating Caravaggio’s *The Call of Matthew* (in the Church of St. Louis of France, close to his usual residence when in Rome; find the image on the Internet and Bede’s homily in his *Homilies on the Gospels*, vol. 1 [Cistercian Publications, 1991] 205–14).

When I meditate on Bede’s homily and Caravaggio’s *Matthew*, I understand why Francis’s immediate reply to Spadaro’s question is “I am a sinner.” I suggest that his reply is not made out of self-deprecation but out of profound self-knowledge gained in his experience of the First Week of Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises, immediately followed—as part of this grace—by amazement that Jesus chose Jorge Mario to follow him as a Jesuit, priest, and now pope. Bede writes: “[Jesus] saw a publican”—a tax-collector and so a public sinner—“and because he saw [him] he felt compassion for him and chose him (*miserando atque eligendo*).” The words, “because he saw [him],” suggest that Jesus sees into Matthew’s heart, as he sees into everyone’s heart, and loves him. I emphasize “see” and “saw” because for Jesus, as Bede implies, seeing is always with love: no true vision without love. For Matthew, this was an instant invitation to conversion, to leave his riches behind and, with all his imperfections, to follow the Lord.

The grace of the First Week of the Exercises is to know oneself as a loved sinner—where the adjective is more important than the noun. Thereafter, conversion upon conversion can follow—one enters into a life of conversion and possibility that implies being sent (*apostolos*). And God’s work is always done by sinners who rejoice in being called *just as they are*. Anyone who has stood dazzled before Caravaggio’s *Matthew* has felt this. For someone who has not yet seen it, the play of light and Jesus’ graceful finger pointing to Matthew and Matthew’s finger pointing to himself is reason enough to travel to Rome.

One of Francis’s messages is indicated by the title given the interview by the publisher, “A Big Heart Open to God.” These are Francis’s words addressed to all

of us. His message: we who follow Jesus must meet people *on their own terms* rather than on ours. Love for the other comes first and *then* possibility—in Kierkegaard's sense: "If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as possibility!" (*Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*).

Since March 13 we have learned that Francis preaches this message more through his actions and style than by his words. This is why the world has opened its heart to him—because he has so opened his heart to the world. Everything else is then possible.

This message has set the Catholic Church into a new, graceful posture, first toward itself—*seeing* itself as loved sinner—and then toward its mission to the world. This posture first says, where are you hurting?—here is ointment. Then we can address other matters as you are willing and able. Francis sees the church first of all "as a field hospital after battle. . . . You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else."

As for the truth to be proclaimed, Francis situates it first within the "*infallibilitas* of the faithful," not the *infallibilitas* of the magisterium. About this he does not (yet) speak. "A beautiful homily," he says, ". . . must begin with . . . the proclamation of salvation. . . . [Preachers] must recognize the heart of their community and must be able to see where the desire for God is lively and ardent. The message of the Gospel . . . is not to be reduced to some aspects that, although relevant, on their own do not show the heart of the message of Jesus Christ." Again: seeing is loving, loving is seeing.

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Editor in Chief

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