Losing One’s Fear of Greek

By Dr. John G. Nordling

Incoming students at Concordia Theological Seminary are typically terrified at the prospect of studying Greek for ten weeks before commencing the seminary curriculum. I would like to show, first, how doable Greek is, then, secondly, how worthwhile.

First, Greek is doable. But how can it be when Americans have that saying, “It’s all Greek to me” (meaning that Greek is anything but clear, comprehensible and doable)? Well, it is doable because we’ve had many years to develop the course and bring students to the high levels needed to internalize the language, and even excel at it. Students should expect to work very hard at Greek, and spend several hours per day in vocabulary memorization, reading and, yes, writing Greek correctly. But hard work pays off, and even students who have never studied a foreign language before are often amazed to see that they can learn Greek—by no means the easiest language on earth—in spite of what were thought to be, at first, quite limited abilities or negative feelings.

Moreover, individual Greek students at CTS are part of a larger group that weather the challenges of learning Greek together. Nor should prospective students think that Greek will be daily drudgery. We have added many fun things that keep the class moving and establish a powerful esprit de corps in students of widely varying backgrounds and abilities: daily singing and song, cartoons, chapel, Gemütlichkeit on Fridays, the Fourth of July celebration (for Summer Greek) and unloading the Michigan trucks for the Food and Clothing Co-op. Students and their families can expect to weather the Greek experience together, and thereby surmount one challenge successfully—like running a marathon or climbing Mount Everest! And they will accomplish this task with others who will become brothers in the office of the Holy Ministry of The Missouri Synod. Newly minted pastors typically look back at the ten-week Greek course as the time and place when their minds began to interact with issues theologically in a way that prepared them not only to complete the M.Div. track successfully, but undertake long and faithful ministries to God’s people in Lutheran congregations anywhere in the world.

Secondly, Greek is worthwhile, as previous comments suggest. Seminarians do not learn Greek to impress outsiders or to snow them with factoids. No, the only acceptable reason for learning Greek at all is because this activity...
prepares future pastors or deaconesses to engage the Greek text on its own terms (instead of always having to rely on a translation) and help future interpreters to articulate the message in the proper and correct English vocables. That’s right: one takes from Greek a better command of the “target language”—which, for those of us living in America, is the English language. An adequate command of Greek, then, equips future interpreters to engage the ancient text more deeply—and enable him (or her, if she is a deaconess) to express the text’s message more accurately in English. I think you can see, then, how pastors and deaconesses who don’t know Greek adequately are at a disadvantage in the interpretative task. Preaching and teaching that conveys Christ and the Gospel clearly to sinners “in the here and now” must at some point rest upon sound textual foundations—that is, knowledge of the Word of God in the original languages. And one of the hallmarks of a pastor in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is that he can preach and teach on that basis—i.e., directly, without having to rely upon translations or hackneyed studies from others.

I encourage you, then, to lose your fear of Greek at Concordia Theological Seminary. Learning Greek well is both doable and worthwhile—truly a “life changing experience” for most. And some desperately miss Greek when it’s over, or think that it’s the “best course” they have ever studied! Be that as it may, it is my prayer that you will give Greek a chance and make the most of a rare opportunity. I look forward to learning with you in my next Greek class at the seminary.

In Christ Jesus,
John G. Nordling

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Is Theology Boring or Joyful?

By Rev. Andrew T. Yeager

To be bored is quite modern. Ironically, society is more over-stimulated than it has ever been. Innovations abound and yet we tire of them so quickly, nothing receives our earnest attention. It’s always on to the next thing; fast-paced lifestyles are often a veneer for a soul grown tired and weary from excitement. No segment of the population suffers from boredom quite like youth. Thrilling video games, movies and other less than edifying modes of entertainment abound, and yet high school and college students grow restless with these and whatever else the world has to offer them. The only encouragement the world has to give is to keep seeking for further excitement and greater thrills.

In contrast with the novelty-driven populace is the student of theology. He is often made a caricature of by his friends—forever flipping his Greek flash cards, Wheelock’s Latin textbook secured firmly under his arm as he walks to class, he plans to do nothing this evening but read Luther well into the night. And yet, this is the beginning of every fruitful, joyous career as a pastor and theologian of Christ’s people. I liken it to a master painter, who must spend hours priming his canvas with that which seems drab and unappealing to the untrained eye. Only then will this artist be allowed to construct an unparalleled work of art which will be deep and rich with the colors of a masterpiece.

At some point, the student of theology has to submit to the loss of the thrill and settle down to the sober interest of his discipline. We may call it the cost of discipleship—the disciple is first called to make a sacrifice; the Apostles are asked to drop their nets (Matthew 4:20). Perhaps this is what our Lord means when He says that a thing will not really live unless it first dies (John 12:24). And what shall die in us but our own self-will, that the will of God might be manifest in us?

In Baptism, we died to sin—our selfish desires for the next thrilling thing were crucified with Christ. Even though we will always be tainted with sin as we live on this earth, we do not belong to it; we are not enslaved by it. We are freed to really live, and the new life we live, we live to God (Romans 6:11). In Baptism, God raises us up daily to be that new man in Christ, and by virtue of our Baptism as new persons in Christ we begin to do the will of the Father.

Don’t take this to mean the work of theologians is all drudgery. As C.S. Lewis once said, “Let the thrill go—let it die away—go on through that period of death into the quieter interest and happiness that follow—and you will find that you are living in a world of new thrills all the time.” Perhaps the joy experienced by Christians is greater and deeper precisely because it comes, not from our own works, but the Work of God. And we know that whatever God chooses for us is always better than whatever we would will for ourselves.

Perhaps, after all, the life in Christ is the most thrilling life anyone can live.

Rev. Andrew T. Yeager is an Admission Counselor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

What is the profile of the most common placement at CTS? Typically, our students are placed as sole pastors (that is, they are the only pastor of the congregation) within established congregations throughout the country. Yes, the Midwestern states are highest on the list for receiving graduates from CTS. The great majority of LCMS congregations being in the upper-Midwest, this is no surprise. This year, many students were called to states like Iowa, Nebraska, Michigan, Minnesota, Indiana and Wisconsin. Being a sole pastor is a huge blessing, as the newly-called and ordained pastor gets to preach, teach and make visits almost exclusively within the flock to which the Lord has called him.

However, there was plenty of variation in the types of placements this year. A few of our graduates were placed as associate or assistant pastors to serve under a senior pastor. These kinds of calls are usually to larger, more urban congregations. Many graduates called to serve as associate or assistant pastors were assigned to a more specific task within the ministry, such as youth work or family life. Some graduates were called to serve dual or tri-point parishes, which means the pastor will be serving a couple of congregations at once.

Interestingly one of our graduates, Seminarian Joshua Gale, was sent as “missionary-at-large” to northeast Philadelphia. This call has assigned Joshua to plant a church in a certain part of the city of Philadelphia, as he is sponsored to do his work by the other congregations of the Philadelphia area. Since the Missouri Synod doesn’t have a large presence in this particular city, Joshua is filling a great need, bringing the Gospel to this area and being a confessional Lutheran voice to the people there. Another graduate, Seminarian Steven Sandfort, was called to be a “church planting pastor” in Colleyville, Texas.

There are always calls to campus ministries and Lutheran schools. This year, Seminarian Matthew Wietfeld was called to be the assistant pastor and principal of the Lutheran school which is attached to Trinity Lutheran Church in Nashville, Illinois. Because the congregation already has a senior pastor, Matthew’s duties will largely involve being a pastor to the students, as he will seek to meet their spiritual needs.

The placement directors note that the landscape is changing, and the candidates who are being called into the Church must change with it. This year, Seminarian Greg Volbrecht was called to Salem Lutheran Church in Madelia, Minnesota, which has both English and Spanish services for worshipers. Greg will be challenged to brush up on his Spanish to fully lead this Spanish service within a year and a half. Students of theology might expect more of these non-traditional calls to arise in the future as the changing landscape of the United States brings the Church into contact with many and diverse ethnicities who have a desire for God’s Word and Sacrament for their lives.

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CTS Admission Counselor Tours

The admission counselors of Concordia Theological Seminary will be traveling throughout the United States to meet with men who are considering the vocation of pastor and women who are considering the vocation of deaconess. Please check to see when there will be a counselor in your area and contact him if you would like to set up a visit.

- **Rev. Timothy Puls**
  
  July: Higher Things–Nevada

- **Rev. Andrew Yeager**
  
  July: Upstate New York; Higher Things–Atlanta
  
  August: Missouri

Admission counselors will represent Concordia Theological Seminary at all Higher Things Conferences this summer:

- Las Vegas, Nevada: July 5–8, 2011
- Atlanta, Georgia: July 19–22, 2011

Please visit our website (www.ctsfw.edu) for more information regarding these upcoming on-campus events:

- Prayerfully Consider Visit: October 20–22, 2011
- Christ Academy/Phoebe Academy College: November 3–6, 2011
- Good Shepherd Institute: November 6–8, 2011
- Prayerfully Consider Visit: March 22–24, 2012