

Reflections on Interview with Pastor Wayne D Mueller  
October 16, 2010

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. <sup>2</sup> He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. <sup>3</sup> He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. (Rev 20:1-3)

The above passage provided the primary inspiration for the interview of Pastor Mueller. The great dragon, the devil, has been chained in the past to promote the spread of the gospel. It is conceivable that we are now living in the times described by the end of this passage, where the devil is set free for a short time before the end. Looking back over the last four decades, I saw a history of exponentially increasing sin and immorality. The primary purpose then of this interview was to obtain Pastor Mueller's perspective on the spread of this immorality over those decades of his service and also from the various perspectives of the different offices he served during his time.

The results were enlightening. Where from my perspective the gross immorality and tolerance of it started in the late 60s and early 70s, it really stretched all the way back to the 50s. Our nation sought so vigorously to be number one that it poured countless dollars into educating its citizens. However, the end result was that education did not live up to its promises of providing a better life and even worse it harmed American spirituality with its liberal teaching. At the same time sexual sins were becoming more prevalent, starting in a location came as no surprise, Hollywood.

While all these seeds were sown, there was a general attitude it seemed of hoping that many of these things would blow over, or at least a sort of shock and disbelief that they were really becoming a problem. According to Pastor Mueller no one expected that they would expand as much as they did. And so at the time of the late 60s, nothing had been really implemented in the Seminary curriculum to address these rising issues. For a pastor to be properly equipped to address a changing culture with the

timeless Scriptures, continuing education was vitally important. This is perhaps one of the most important lessons to be learned from this. It is just as true now as it was in the 70s.

As immorality ramped itself up in the 70s with abortion, drug use and sexuality, another unforeseen impact on the pastoral ministry came to bear. With these problems seeping into members of our congregations, the time spent dealing with these issues on an individual basis multiplied extensively. Because of this drain and the added attention needed by members, the amount of members that one pastor could effectively shepherd dropped dramatically. This remains a problem today. Where one or even two pastors were effective before, now there is simply too much for them to do for them to do it all effectively. Yet with dropping contributions, the financial viability of employing the necessary number of pastors just isn't there. It's something we'll continue to wrestle with into the future.

Unrelated to the main theme of the interview but still an important point to note in Pastor Mueller's career was the case in Kokomo, IN. This was an eye opener for me. Prior to delving into this my unchallenged and unvoiced assumption was just that any doctrinal disputes that members came up with stemmed from a lack of proper education and communication. The idea that someone in our circles who had been shown from Scripture where they were mistaken would continue in that error by their own reasoning had just never occurred to me. Of course, looking at the history in doctrine in the Christian church, this really should be no surprise, but for some reason I had this notion of us as a unified synod with no real need to address misunderstanding on any level but the local church. The case was instructive in that manner and just generally important in that it reinforced our stand on Objective Justification as a true teaching of the Bible.

One issue that came up in the course of the interview that I had only been dimly aware of in the past was the role of men and women issues that began to arise in the 80s. Growing up the roles were taught to me in quite definitive terms and were never questioned by me, and to anyone who had a question a proper biblical answer was given that confirmed what I had been taught. To this end it was a surprise to

learn that the synod needed to study and establish these principles as recently as the 80s, as far as I could tell, these principles had always been taught.

A few other things that I hadn't really considered, being outside of the realm of my experience was the increase in family abuse brought about by the breakdown of the family unit and the impact that the changing family had on our future pastors. Many men who grew up either in a single-parent household or a household with two working parents had not matured emotionally as far as noticed in previous generations and this became an obstacle for them to overcome.

It was very comforting to learn of all that the synod does for our churches from an inside perspective and gave me a renewed appreciation of the importance and usefulness of that synod. Having a worker-training system that one can fall back on for questions is one thing but also the many support mechanisms the synod offers our church bodies, especially with called workers as dedicated as Pastor Mueller to be out in congregations every Sunday offering help and support in these difficult times.

Ultimately, the Gospel is timeless and is as efficacious now as it always has been. Getting people into the Word on a regular basis is the only final help we will have to combat the increase in immorality and sin that the world continues to plummet into. It is altogether likely that we will never reclaim the days we had before this rampant immorality in our society came upon us where sin is treated as nothing, tolerated and in many cases encouraged. Our fight in the future will probably only grow more difficult, but too much is at stake to give up.

## Interview Questions

Could you describe the sequence of events that led you into the pastoral ministry?

In 1965, about a year (?) before you enrolled at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the Vicar year was made a mandatory part of the Seminary training. Do you remember the reaction to that decision among you and your classmates in college at the time?

Many of the modern moral issues that the church faces in American society today trace their roots back to the late 60s and early 70s. While many of these particular sins are as old as humanity, they started to become more public and tolerated by the majority of society. Was there a sense of this moral shift already while you were training at the seminary, and if so what steps did the seminary take to prepare you for this change?

Your first assignment out of the Seminary in 1970 was to Trinity congregation in Crete, Illinois. Could you describe what the congregation and your ministry there was like?

In 1973 the famous Roe v Wade decision was reached. Can you describe what impact this had on your congregation and what steps or methods, if any, you took to address the issue?

What other moral issues did you encounter in that congregation that had grown significantly in intensity since previous generations or that you didn't expect to have to deal with at all, and how did you go about handling them? (eg divorce, cohabitation, substance abuse in congregational consciousness or increasing number of individuals with troubles)

In 1977 you took a call to another Trinity congregation in Waukesha, Wisconsin. How did that congregation differ from where you were serving and what factors led you to accept that call?

In 1980 you were appointed to serve on a district review committee to handle an appeal of a case where four people had been removed from fellowship in Kokomo, Indiana. Could you tell us more about that situation and your involvement?

Starting in 1981 homosexuality was brought more to the national consciousness with the discovery of aids. Can you describe how this impacted your congregation and how you responded to it?

Were there any other areas where you noticed particularly increased moral decay among your members in Waukesha and then how you chose to address the matters?

In 1984 you accepted the call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as professor of theology. Could you describe general setting of the Seminary then as well as your responsibilities?

In what ways had seminary education adapted to prepare students for the changing moral climate of America since your time as a student?

Had the modern moral decay begun to have a noticeable effect on the student body of the seminary?

From 1990-2008 you served at the synod office, first as Administrator for Parish Services and then as Synod Vice President. What were your responsibilities in each of these areas?

In these roles you no doubt had a better understanding of how the whole of the church bodies in the synod were handling the rising tide of immorality. In what ways were our congregations affected during these years and how did you see it best addressed?

How did the synod itself attempt to help church bodies struggling to combat these issues within their membership?

Your time at the Synod office took place during one of our greater financial crunches in the early 2000s. Could you provide some information on what exactly happened to cause it and the repercussions?

In 2008 you took the call to serve again as a parish minister for St. John's Lutheran in Jefferson, Wisconsin. What factors caused you to accept this call?

How has the landscape of the parish ministry been affected by the moral decay since the last time you served in the parish ministry in 1984?

What issue or issues do you see as being the most significant in opposing the church in its mission to spread the gospel?

What encouragement or advice would you offer to future generations of pastors attempting to do God's will in a nation so tolerant of gross sin?