

Connected Soul & Role

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by Dr. Kina S. Mallard, Reinhardt University President

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I am thrilled to be in Georgia, at Reinhardt University, and among the Methodists again!

I heard once that if you want to know what sin your pastor is dealing with or working on, look at his sermon topics. I have been asked to talk about faith and leadership which is most appropriate because faith and leadership is something I am always working on. It also is appropriate because I can remember the first time I seriously and intentionally contemplated the question, “How does my faith inform my leadership?” Or even, “Does my faith inform my leadership.”

Over the years, I have come to frame this question, this issue, as the connection of my soul, which belongs to Jesus Christ, and my role as a professor and administrator which seemed to belong to the university. My consideration of a connection between soul and role began in a faculty development workshop in the mid ‘90s when the leader asked the group a very provocative question from the writings of Dallas Willard. And here’s the question:

“If Jesus is Lord of all knowledge, how dumb can He be?” If Jesus, Lord God, is the creator, then he created all knowledge – all knowledge of every little thing. If we accept this premise, then how dumb can Jesus be?

My journey as a professor and leader up until the time I was confronted with this question, a question I could not shake, a question that forced my soul to wrestle with my role began when I completed my master’s degree and was hired to teach speech at North Greenville College. North Greenville was, at that time, a two-year junior college - faith-based college - affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention. As a novice instructor at a college that openly talked about faith, I first asked the question:

“How should teaching speech at a private, Christian college look different from teaching speech at a state, secular school?” Or even, “Should it?”

When I left North Greenville to pursue my doctorate I still didn’t have a well-formed answer to that question. Upon completion of my Ph.D. I was hired as chair of the Communications Department at Union University, another faith-based school, in Jackson, Tenn. I was 30 years old. My first years at Union provided great role clarification. I was a successful professor, and I was a successful administrator. The chair role allowed me to do both – to teach and to lead. But before long, the desire for leadership took hold as I worked with the communication faculty to build a strong department. It was during this period, I attended the life-changing workshop on integration of faith and learning – which I transposed as integration of faith and leading – the connecting of my soul and my role.

When soul and role are connected one becomes an authentic leader and authentic leadership is Christ-centered leadership. It is more than values and ethics, or quotes about how to do right and live well. It goes deeper.

Parker Palmer, educator and author, in an address at the Meridian Street United Methodist Church, in Indiana, titled “Spirituality and Leadership” gives this definition of a leader:

“A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being – conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.”

To be an authentic leader I must learn more than just the external skills to perform my role well, I need to delve deep into the inner thoughts and motivations that dwell in the soul. The recesses of my conscious where the Holy Spirit empowers me in my journey to be more like Christ.

For many, it is paradoxical to think about connecting the life of the mind or the life of work with the life of faith. If you listen to the news at all, you will find story after story of leaders leading a divided life. A life where their work and their faith never meet. A life where some attend church, statistics say four out of five pray at least once a week, many tout “family values” as part of their political or public relations campaigns. Yet few live authentic lives of connection. We shouldn’t be surprised because leadership is a paradox.

Leaders struggle between being self-reliant and trusting others

Leaders struggle between optimism and realism, between being decisive and being democratic, between a sense of urgency and realistic patience.

Leaders struggle between leading with head and leading with heart.

Christian leaders struggle with what it means to be in the world, but not of the world, to maintain an authentic relationship between their thoughts and their actions.

But we have good news in the struggle. Jesus is ahead of us. He knows the thoughts we should and will be thinking, the actions we should and will be taking.

The text for the faculty development workshop many years ago was Luke 5. I will read from The Voice Bible:

“Picture these events: On the banks of Gennesaret Lake, a huge crowd, Jesus in the center of it, presses in to hear His message from God. Off to the side, fishermen are washing their nets, leaving their boats unattended on shore.

Jesus gets into one of the boats and asks its owner, Simon, to push off and anchor a short distance from the beach. He sits down and teaches the people.

After speaking to the crowd for awhile, Jesus turns to Simon.

Jesus: Move out into deeper water, and drop your nets to see what you’ll catch.

Simon: (perplexed): Master, we’ve been fishing all night, and we haven’t caught even a minnow. But... all right, I’ll do it if You say so.

Simon then gets his fellow fishermen to help him let down the nets, and to their surprise, the water is bubbling with thrashing fish – a huge school. The strands of their nets start snapping under the weight of the catch, so the crew shouts to the other boats to come out and give them a hand. They start scooping fish out of the nets and into their boats, and before long, their boats are so full of fish they almost sink!

Simon’s fishing partners, James and John, along with the rest of the fishermen, see this incredible haul of fish. They’re all stunned, especially Simon. He comes close to Jesus and kneels in front of His knees.

Simon: I can’t take this, Lord. I’m a sinful man. You shouldn’t be around the likes of me.

Jesus: Don’t be afraid Simon. From now on, I’ll ask you to bring Me people instead of fish.

The fisherman haul their fish-heavy boats to land, and they leave everything to follow Jesus.

Let’s think about this together. Simon Peter, James and John made their living as fisherman. Jesus, on the other hand, was a carpenter. He cut wood. He built things. We have no knowledge of his skill fishing. Yet, Jesus instructed Peter in the very subject Peter knew best. And Peter balked a little. That night, he had failed at fishing, he was tired of trying, I am sure he was skeptical. But because Jesus is Jesus, Peter obeyed. And he was surprised! Jesus knew more about where the fish were than Peter.

When Peter surrendered to Jesus’ knowledge. When he listened to Jesus, he was given more success than he could have ever imagined.

That day, I began considering what I believed about Jesus. Could He give me wisdom in accordance with my profession, skills and intellectual

needs?” I took the bait. I let down my net. I was hooked.

In the classroom: How might my obedience in following Jesus precede my daily efforts in choosing course content, classroom examples, student assignments.

In my work relationships: How might my seeking the mind and heart of Christ create more meaningful conversations, with students in my office, with colleagues in meetings, with community partners?

In my leadership: How might my acknowledgment that Jesus knows more than I know about strategic planning, conflict resolution, personnel management, budgeting, teambuilding, influence the way I structure my work and plan for the future?

In my family life: How might communicating with Jesus – asking Him for wisdom in the moment – in the big and the seemingly small matters – strengthen my relationship with my husband, my children, my mom?

Thomas Merton writes, “There is in all things... a hidden wholeness.” Bringing the hidden wholeness into the light, into my life, is my desire as a leader. Daily keeping role and soul connected has become a focus of who I am as I strive to resist the divided life.

Sometimes I become lazy and forget Jesus has Knowledge to advise me.

Sometimes I become too self-sufficient and forget that Jesus is Knowledge – I need to rely on Him. Often, I become busy and forget to stop and take time to access His Knowledge.

In those times, James 1:5 comes to mind, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God...*

The uniting of soul and role – of head and heart – is one of the defining marks of John Wesley’s own faith.

Wesley encouraged the faithful to think, to ask questions, to embrace doubts. Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Sanctified Knowledge,” expresses in its third stanza a longing to:

“Unite the pair so long disjoin’d,
Knowledge and vital Piety.” The text of the hymn then connects “Learning with Holiness” and “Truth with Love.” The Methodist revival sought to balance intellect and emotion, head and heart, role and soul.

This uniting of soul and role is the only way to be an authentic leader and authentic leadership leads to authentic influence.

As president of Reinhardt University, I have the privilege and the responsibility to be part of the influencing process – to help shape the lives of thousands of students.

I know there will be days when the responsibility is overwhelming, when I doubt my abilities, when I second guess my decisions, when I am unable to put criticism in perspective, and when I forget the connection between who I am and what I do.

I ask for your prayers so in those moments, I will remember, Jesus is Lord of All. Jesus is Lord of All.

Lord of my thoughts and my service each day. Jesus is Lord of All.

I will remember the great joy that comes from Authentic Leadership. Authentic Leadership that can only occur when one is connected. Connected Soul and Role. — KM



More About Kina S. Mallard, Ph.D.

On May 16, 2015, Dr. Kina S. Mallard became the 20th president of Reinhardt University in Waleska, Ga. Mallard came to Reinhardt from Carson-Newman University, Jefferson City, Tenn., where she had served in senior leadership positions since 2009. Previously, she also held academic leadership posts at Gordon College, Wenham, Mass., and Union University, Jackson, Tenn. Her teaching career began in 1982 as a graduate teaching associate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn. She also taught fine arts at North Greenville College, Tigerville, S.C., in the mid-1980s.

Mallard has a Doctorate of Philosophy in Communication and a Master of Arts in Organizational Communication from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn., and a Bachelor of Science in Speech and Theatre from Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tenn. Her published works explore academic leadership, communication, private and Christian higher education and finding joy in one’s work.

A dynamic presenter, she gave the keynote address at the Women in Higher Education in Tennessee Conference in 2012. She has also presented at conferences for the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, the Council of Independent Colleges and the International Society for Exploration of Teaching and Learning. Her presentations focus on faculty development, assessment, leadership, advising and instruction.

Mallard was very active in the community serving on the Jefferson County (Tenn.) Chamber of Commerce, in national professional organizations as a senior fellow for the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and a workshop leader for the Council of Independent Colleges. Since moving to Georgia, she has started making connections with community leaders and local civic organizations.

Mallard is married to Steve Dietz, director of business development for Food Donation Connection, and together they have five children, three of whom are married. They are looking forward to welcoming their first grandchild in August 2015.

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Since 1883, Reinhardt has focused on meeting student needs one person at a time. Reinhardt’s emphasis is on personalized education, best provided in small classes by talented professors who truly care about their students. As a comprehensive university grounded in the liberal arts, Reinhardt has a residential campus 45 minutes northwest of Atlanta, Ga., a bustling adult education program in Alpharetta, Ga., and selected program offerings in Cartersville and Canton, Ga. For more, see reinhardt.edu.