

## The spirituality of dialogue

By Donna Dolan, RSCJ

**D**aniel O’Leary, a frequent contributor to *The Tablet*, says that “words transform us. Beautiful words redeem our spirit. They find their way into places of hurt within us and heal them. They slip past the sentries of the mind. They are the kisses of the soul. They enter our bodies like Holy Communion and then they do their fertile work. We live our days differently when we carry living words inside us.”<sup>1</sup>

We find a beautiful illustration of this in John’s gospel in the conversation of the Samaritan woman with Jesus. He enters the story worn out, fragile. His mind is tired as he stops at the well. As the dialogue unfolds, we meet a woman who is “coming to see.” Jesus speaks very softly, words she was probably longing to hear – about the mystery of living water and its power to rejuvenate life. As we listen to the dialogue, we note how Jesus has touched the woman’s mind, touched her heart, touched her being. He has offered her truth in a simple, compassionate way. Moved by his mysterious dignity and by his peaceful presence, she has put aside her point of view. Now the Spirit wells up within her. The dialogue has moved them into communion; as the drama unfolds we are invited into and engaged in the spirituality of their dialogue.



Rosa Vázquez, RSCJ

Living words shape our lives in many ways. Conversations shape us and create our futures. Over the past three years, because of our declining numbers, the Canadian Province, with Jane Maltby, RSCJ, as our facilitator, has met for serious conversations that have moved us to take responsibility for our future. Despite all odds, what choices could each one make to create a new future? What would each one be willing to let go of, and what would each one want to take forward? To enter effectively into a spirituality of dialogue each one had to be willing to set aside her point of view and listen deeply. After each session, Jane offered the following questions for our personal reflection:

- What happened?
- How did I feel?
- What did I learn?
- Are there any next steps for me?

Was there any dialogue, or was I holding to my own point of view? Our point of view can sometimes be narrow. Often it comes from the past, our parents, our culture, our reading, our experience. Other people bring other points of view, which often enlarge the dialogue. When we listen to one another, conversation happens and conflict begins to be eroded. Communion happens in the listening, leading us to a more authentic spirituality of dialogue.

At the present moment, we have a Dialogue Committee made up of some members of the United States Province and the Canadian Province. Together we are coming to see new opportunities for partnership, new levels of consciousness and a more authentic relationship as RSCJ in the USA and Canada, as we move toward the creation of a new province. To date, the Dialogue Committee has had only two face to face meetings. At one of our sessions, we discussed the current polarities in the church and the seemingly sad overthrow of Vatican II. Staying with that point of view could have taken us down a weary and dreary road. However, one of our committee offered a more authentic vision, focusing on our charism in the modern world.

***Together we are coming to see new opportunities for partnership, new levels of consciousness and a more authentic relationship as RSCJ.***

Is it relevant? Yes. Is the world of today hungering for the love of Jesus, “his words, his attitudes, his relationship with people, his way of relating to all created things?”<sup>2</sup> Yes. Does it make a difference to the way we want to be as RSCJ? What are the gifts and riches, the calls and the hopes embodied in our charism, handed on to us by Madeleine Sophie Barat?

It is easy to stir up emotions when we look at our church today but perhaps more difficult to stir up our wills. We are going through a period of history when being a Catholic or a member of a religious order takes a lot of will. A spirituality of dialogue characterized by commitment of will as well as feeling moves us beyond “the sentries of the mind” to involvement in real ways with other people and all created things. In the encounter with the Samaritan woman we meet Jesus. In that scene he appears gentle. Weary. But his will is strong, as strong as it is in other encounters when we meet him as stern, dismissive, challenging or demanding accountability of us.

The spirituality of dialogue is a dance of spiritual moves where each partner in the dialogue relies on the other to complete the steps, the beautiful moves that “do their fertile work and redeem our spirit.” ✦

1. “Poetry Please,” article by Daniel O’Leary in *The Tablet*, April 7, 2012.
2. *Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart*, §19



*Donna Dolan, RSCJ, is a member of the Canadian Province. She has recently moved from Prince George, British Columbia, to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her ministries include nursing, education, retreats and spiritual direction, as well as training in grief and trauma ministry.*