

FROM HEART TO HEART

(Eugene) Register-Guard, March 17, 2007

With freedom comes responsibility to act in God's image

by Mary Sharon Moore

I did not want to see these words in the morning paper as I ate my breakfast. But the image emblazoned itself instantly in my mind, so it didn't really matter that I put the paper down to focus instead on my toast.

The story was about the genocide in a village near Darfur (Nicholas Kristof, "Genocide brings out worst, best," Register-Guard, 11/28/06, Page A9), and the ravages of the marauding, calculated, overwhelming evil that stalks this African region.

The paragraph that ripped a hole through my heart told of a 12-year-old girl, kidnapped and gang-raped for a week, her legs "pulled so far apart that she is now crippled."

I closed the paper and tried to eat, a weak attempt to distract myself. I needed to grieve, to go inside that hole in my heart and grieve for a 12-year-old girl who has had to suffer these unimaginable atrocities. I wrestled with the unsettling question: What can I do?

Some might open their morning paper, read fresh accounts of the endless violence in this world, and ask: How can God allow these things to happen?

For some, these brutalities merely affirm their belief that God does not exist, that we're on our own in this dangerous world, needing to do away with whatever might pose a threat.

But the God of the Christian Scriptures, whom Jesus called "Abba" (Papa), has set us free—not with liberty to do whatever we

please to whomever, reaping whatever outcomes serve our purposes. Rather, God gives us freedom to become fully what we were destined to be from the beginning: images of God, free to participate in the divine life.

With this freedom comes a responsibility: to help others to achieve the same. God also allows us our expressions of unfreedom, those actions and attitudes that turn us from God, against one another and toward ourselves.

I cannot impose a Christian understanding of freedom on those bent on raping, pillaging and destroying human lives or entire cultures and the loveliness they may contain. But I can recognize in their terrifying unfreedom the unfreedom of humankind that Jesus willingly embraced and conquered.

I can't heal the anguish of a 12-year-old girl in a village in Africa, but I can allow her anguish to enter into my heart, and I can hold that anguish in prayer, believing that this child's agony moves the very heart of God.

I can't personally halt the unspeakable atrocities of genocide, nor can I walk away from them with a clear conscience. As a baptized member of the body of Christ, I am sent to be part of the solution. At the core of my being I carry the tension between praying earnestly and acknowledging the need to respond. How will I act? How will each of us act? I pray that God will guide each of us with wisdom and courage.