

About the Book

The Story of the Rice Cakes has been told before, as part of a story in the Author's book *Angel Wings*, and as part of his novel *Tall Grow the Tallowwoods*.

Why, then, tell it a third time?

The answer is that the story was not told in full. Geoffrey Bingham's reference to the happening in both books has been oblique rather than face to face.

Over the years he has felt it is a very valuable account of the pain of a Prisoner of War who discovers the truth of the biblical doctrine of human depravity, and is shocked by it.

It causes the Prisoner to enquire further about the nature of human beings. In the course of his enquiries it is suggested to him that the moral law, known as 'the ten commandments', is in fact of human invention, and is without Divine origin.

This small book describes the conflict which was in the mind of the Prisoner. He recognised that it matters much whether the law is of Divine or human origin.

Readers will also be alerted to the fact that everything in morality and ethics depends upon the law being of God and not of Man.

For this reason alone, the book is well worth reading.

About the Author

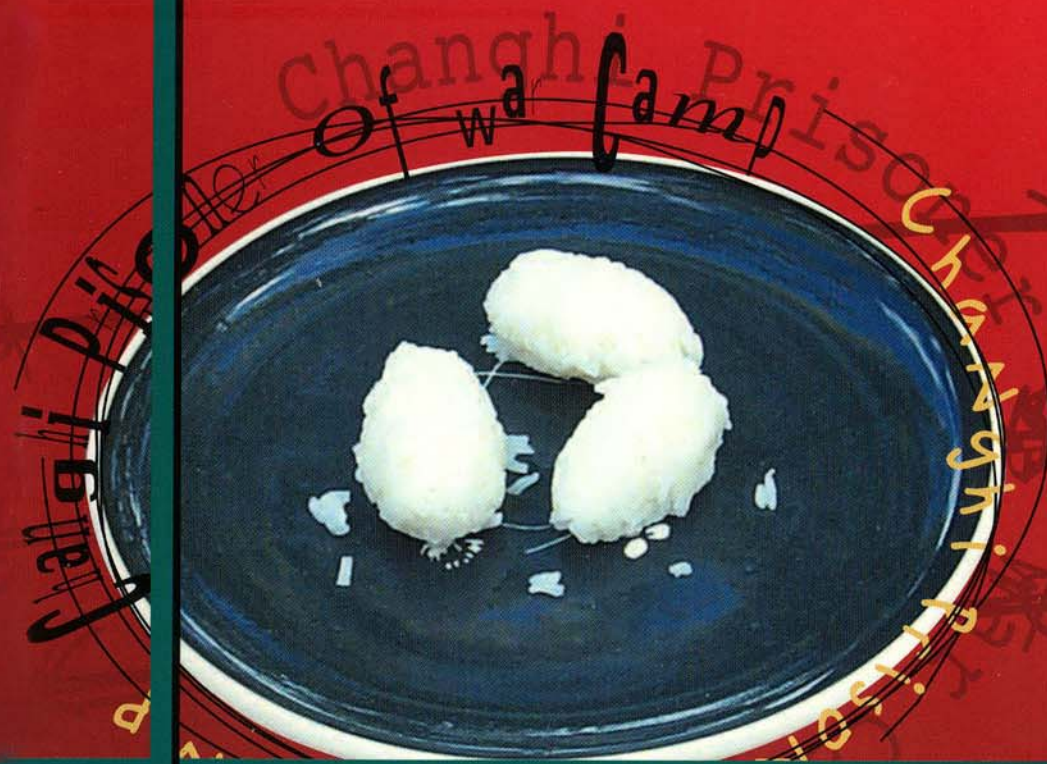
Geoffrey Bingham – husband of Laurel Bingham and father of six – has been an Army man, a POW under the Japanese, a farmer, writer, pastor and missionary, and so writes of a varied experience.

Although 80 years of age he is still at life and work without retirement. Presently leading the New Creation Teaching Ministry, his chief love is writing.

This book comes out of that background.

Vintage stuff!

 **New Creation Publications Inc.**



The Story of the Rice Cakes

The search for Moral Sanity in a Prisoner of War Camp
by Geoffrey Bingham

The Story of the Rice Cakes:

The Search for Moral Sanity in a Prisoner of
War Camp

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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Foreword

Many years ago I wrote about what I have called ‘The Story of the Rice Cakes’. One account was written in a volume titled *Angel Wings*, and the other in a novel called *Tall Grow the Tallowwoods*. For some time it has been in my mind to open up historical material which was not included in these two accounts. My desire has been to enlarge the background and show how significant the event was for me, the writer; the idea being that it might prove significant for readers. Many folk have told me that it has been notable for them: they have never forgotten the story. Others have said it has been crucial for their lives, and for moral understanding.

I am hoping, then, that the little story may still carry a punch, and, in fact, that it may prove more effective than it has been; that the larger picture, having being drawn, may touch many who view it; touch them on their moral nerve and make more sense of law than hitherto.

I have had some fifty-five years to think about the event of the rice-cakes, and so many things have come to me because of that contemplation. I am sure the account will surpass the former

written account, and prove helpful to attendant readers.

So, with that thought and hope, we send out this small book.

*Geoffrey Bingham
November 1998
Kingswood, South Australia*

The Story of the Rice Cakes

The Background and Beginning of a Story

You will have to bear with me as I try to repaint the situation and conditions under which we lived in Changi Prisoner of War Camp. Much of the material I will be using goes back to December 1941 and on to February 1942. From the happenings in that period, it then carries on to August 1945. In the December to February period we had fought a war down the Malay Peninsula. British and Australian troops, including Indian soldiers of the British Indian Army, had fought that war against the Japanese who entered Malaya from Thailand. I am not interested in recounting the details of this war because I have but one story in mind in this small book.

The particular Australian troops of which I was a member had been situated on the East Coast of the Peninsula, centred at the coastal village of Mersing, with infantry battalions and an artillery regiment all linked in military fashion. These units had been called to effect a strategic withdrawal so that we could cross from the Peninsula over the causeway which joined the

mainland to Singapore Island. Once arrived, we took up strategic positions with other Australian and British troops facing north to the state of Johore. Scarcely had the last of the Allied Forces crossed on to the Island than the Japanese began a fierce artillery and aerial bombardment of Singapore Island. As the targeted oil tanks burned, there was an oily black pall over all flora, fauna, armed forces and endless lines of fleeing, despairing humanity.

In the fighting that ensued, the Japanese crossed the Johore Straits in innumerable barges, and landed—under artillery protection—on the northern shores of Singapore Island. Days of fighting followed, and during that time I was badly injured, my right leg catching a burst of machine-gun fire. This was to leave me with a partially paralysed leg, and permanent nerve pain.

Incarcerated in Changi Prisoner of War Camp

On the 15th of February 1942, General Percival and high-ranking officers gave in to the demand for an unconditional surrender to the Japanese Army. The capitulation to an enemy we had once considered to be inferior to us was demoralising, to say the least. Many British and Australian troops were quite embittered, and the loss of morale made some who were wounded or who had contracted painful illnesses succumb to death.

No one can compute the state of the human spirit in defeat. Many had been demoralised during the fighting and became despairing when imprisonment faced them, seemingly and sickeningly without hope of rescue.

That, of course, is not the whole story. Through the years many battled low morale and outrageous prison conditions to return home, but none of us knew it would be three and half years to the day before we would be liberated by successful Allied Forces. Whilst there were terrible incidents of Japanese cruelty and persecution, what was most devastating was the steady and unremitting starvation we faced, which was a daily cruelty. The troops which were sent north to work on the Burma–Thailand railway construction suffered much more than those who were left on Singapore Island. Not only were their rations dreadfully inadequate, but they also faced the hazards of climate and forced heavy labour, as well as the insane cruelty of their captors. Diseases were rife, and the most deadly of all—cholera—meant that one in every three men died. Many are the books which have been written of the lives of POWs in the various Prison Camps throughout the lands the Nipponese held.



My story is, of course, linked with some of that suffering. In my own case I was moved a number of times from one hospital to another, and each time I had to have my leg reset. For some days

the wound was filled with maggots, but that, I was told, was not a bad thing since they helped to sanitise it. I am sure I could speak of deep pain, and without doubt, could move some readers to pity for my case. That is certainly not what I am about in this story: I only want to describe the conditions which were the background, and which led to the event which I have called 'the story of the rice cakes'.

The Beginnings of Suffering

What I know is that I lost five and half stone in six weeks. From being twelve and half stone I went down to being below seven stone—less than one hundred pounds in body weight. I was skin and bone, skin tight on the face, the eyes sunken, the hair sparse, teeth loose from malnutrition. At one stage I could put my longest finger and thumb around my thigh. I had—like so many others—had bouts of bacillary dysentery, malaria, dengue fever and other illnesses, and they—along with the meagre diet of food—brought me to this state. Some of my friends did not recognise me when they saw me in bed with the surgical extension of my right leg. One close friend who was visiting me had to exit rapidly and spewed out the little valuable food he had in his stomach. It took months before he would visit me again. He said that the stench of the ward—'the surgical stink'—made it impossible to see me, impossible not to retch.

Things were not always as bad as I have just described them. The medical personnel who attended us, such as doctors, orderlies, medical technicians and cooking staff, were—most of them—fine men, and, in one sense, none was better off than the others. Friends did their best to help us, here an occasional tasty tidbit and there a book or two to read, and even paper and pencils as they knew my passion to write. Those who helped me most were men of moral integrity and spiritual faith. No matter how short had been our war, comparatively speaking, fighting men nevertheless suffer the traumas of the fighting; and when the disgrace of capitulation is added, and the deadly reality of incarceration, all combine to bring devastating emotional pressure to bear on the human mind and spirit. In self-defence some of us just went into a withdrawal from reality, others, as I have said, succumbed easily to death. Yet others fought a lonely battle about the whole matter, day in and day out. Many became cynical, bitter, distraught, and some were like lone islands in a vast ocean, internalising their horror and privatising their sufferings. Those who by nature were monads just existed without much joy or thought of adventure.

I had gone into the Prison Camp Hospital as one gladly dependent upon those who ministered to me. I suppose I was, by nature, what some call 'a strong character'. I certainly was a person of faith, and insisted on continuing this way. I

had a Bible and read it continuously. I also prayed. I read good literature as it became available, but my greatest problem was unremitting pain. I was immensely grateful for the morphia which helped to give respite from the pain, but when that relief was cut off, and no pain-killers were available, then I discovered what a human being can become when denied relief from pain. I pass over that episode of cold turkey withdrawal, and the low cunning I developed in an endeavour to wheedle relief: I was shocked at my own chicanery, bewildered that I could be so dishonest. A large number of us went through that and emerged the other side forced to learn to live with pain. I can remember the first line of a poem I wrote during that confusion. It ran, 'We must have faith whilst we have worlds to conquer'. Its theme was just that: that we must hold on against all odds insisting that our faith in God was essential to face the incredible odds. The nights were so long, what with our pain and the continuous, pitiful crying of the terribly wounded.

Of course it was not all pain, not all desperation. A corporate spirit of fighting death, a persistent optimism and marvellous Aussie humour sustained us. Being able to read and write was, for many of us, a pleasant relief from the stresses under which we lived. The medical staff were unremitting in their kindness and care. Some of us loved our attending doctors as though they were fathers. Even so, many things kept troubling us.

Depravity a Shock to the Human Spirit

I remember the day I had my greatest shock. It was when a friend told me that some of our own troops had broken into the hospital store and stolen precious drugs and tinned foods and had sold them on the black market in order to keep themselves alive at the expense of those who were helpless and less fortunate than themselves. Of course I was appalled because these drugs were otherwise unobtainable and most necessary for bad surgical and medical cases. The tinned food was for those who needed that kind of food to keep them alive during terrible illnesses.

In one sense the news did not come as a surprise. It was always with me as a kind of horror that, during action, men became demoralised by certain pressures, and the cry would go up, 'Every man for himself', and then the strength of mutual security was wholly lost. We knew that the other dreadful cry, 'Blow you Jack, I'm all right!' meant the utter moral devastation of otherwise organised corporate humanity. The Navy had an equivalent cynical statement, 'I'm in the boat: push off!' We had heard of the loss of morale and the horrible things crazed troops did in their desperate bid to get off Singapore Island in the face of impending imprisonment and, perhaps, massacre by the enemy. Some forced their way on to departing ships, even at the point of bayonets. The sickening fact that there were cases of troops forcing civilians off so that they

could get on the vessels was a repetition of what has happened in wars throughout man's history. Of course there were also cases of high heroism and self-abnegation, but they did not cancel out treachery to the human race of self-saving men.

I was twenty-three years old at that time and, although I had pondered humanity deeply, I was appalled at what human beings can do. I had been brought up in a Calvinistic tradition and knew the theological doctrine of the total depravity of Man. I was alert enough as a young person to know there was cruelty, selfishness and other evil in the world in which I lived even before the war. History is long on that kind of evil of Man, but the fact is that when I now saw depravity in its raw forms, I was shocked. One can live more or less comfortably in a world of theological abstractions, but then one is horrified beyond measure when confronted with the concrete realities of which that theology has spoken. The high danger in which one can live is to take the higher moral ground in one's judgment of depraved persons. This is the incipient Pharisaism of all self-righteous persons, and how many of us escape it? Everyone takes the high moral ground: everyone.

If I had been more mature and more realistic about life, I would not have taken what I saw in that black and white way which is characteristic of most young people. I would have recognised more of the fine actions of those who helped us, those who served us in the medical corps, and other services. I would have realised that it was

not just depravity which I saw. The self-centred action in battle undoubtedly happened showing that human beings quickly revert to self-saving when death threatens. This, of course, goes on in all kinds of disasters such as war, massacres, floods, famines and times of plagues. As a matter of fact it goes on when a country is prosperous, when the land is disaster free, and when society seems to be what we call 'civilised'. In society, people are constantly in competition with one another, and often to the death. Not only in terrible physical disasters is it that people trample over others to save themselves. In politics, commerce, industry, education and art—to name a few areas—the same rivalry and ambition prevails, and the crushing cruelty of many stops little short of the demonic. Most human beings reach the goals they set for themselves, no matter what the cost and the hurt and pain they may bring to others. The fear of death, it seems, is behind much of our struggle to secure the highest places in our vocation, professions, trades, other occupations and social groupings. The battle for success and survival is carried on with the hope and idea that, somehow, we can secure ourselves against loss and the extinction of inexorable death. Although I saw this in strong outline under the conditions and stresses of a Prison Camp, yet I have since seen this has been the way of humanity throughout all societies, cultures and religions of all peoples in all ages. As Milton said, 'Fame is the spur!', and he might have added, 'And also the

fear of death makes us callous, and oblivious of the needs of others!

I doubt whether I can convey the despair, shock and anger that I felt in prison days at human depravity. No matter how well brought up were men of every social class in the armed forces, yet in the face of heavy stress many broke down. One high-ranking British officer caught in the debacle of the Burma–Thailand situation said, ‘I did not know a man could become an animal in twenty-four hours’. He was speaking of himself as a human being. The playing fields of Eton, the halls of Oxbridge and the high training of Sandhurst suddenly, cruelly, meant nothing in the face of the terrible threat of death.

The Battle for Beauty and Truth

After six months of what I called ‘holding on by faith’, my mind rebelled radically; turned to anger, judgment and criticism. I decided Christianity had no answer for me in the situation of near-starving, of Christian friends who sought to save themselves by being in rackets whilst here and there even a chaplain or two went under in the same immoral way. I was genuinely troubled, and, in reaction, even decided I was an atheist. I began to read everything I could lay my hands upon, including the major world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and the tenets of Confucius. I caught

up with what was then current psychology and psychotherapy. I even ploughed through a course on philosophy. At one point there had been a university program, but it fell apart when lecturers were taken off on working parties. I read as much as I could in conformity with that tertiary course. I also read many critical studies on Christianity, including theologians who had hitherto been on my evangelical index. I had good friends among the chaplains, but my criticisms were so sharp and savage that they seemed glad to bypass me. Only one or two seemed to understand my problem, and they stayed with me quietly, uncritical in their concern for me.

At the distance of fifty-five years or more the matters which deeply troubled me do not now seem so critical, but I think the principles were nevertheless highly important, and I needed to make my way through them. In my reaction to my early training, which seemed not to have fitted me for the world in which I now lived, I read so much which was rationalist thinking, and so I really put Christianity on the carpet. I need not trouble you, here, with the patterns of my thinking. I can only report that I was a very unhappy person throughout what I called ‘my search’. I attended church services, but could not believe the men could sing hymns which had such high thought, and yet which seemed to be treated by them as ‘run of the mill’. The words as I read them were extraordinary, so that no thinking person could accept hymns and prayers as they

were written. To me they were either incredibly high thinking or they were inane, mediocre, the thoughtless mouthings of flat traditionalism.

One day a friend of mine chatted as he massaged my injured leg. 'You must be the most egotistical of all men I have ever met', he said.

I could scarcely believe my ears. I was shocked. I asked him to explain, but he did not care to do so. I went away, my pride quite injured, my mind stunned. In fact I went around for some weeks with a lacerated spirit. I knew he was not thinking I had dropped my ethical standards and joined in what I thought was depraved living. It was not until much later that I realised what he was meaning. Even so, that understanding did not come before the event which I call 'the story of the rice cakes'.

The Strange Story of the Rice Cakes

I had been thinking for some time on what is variously called 'the law', 'the law of God', 'the moral law', or 'the ten commandments'. As a boy I knew these off by heart, and they were, in fact, the standard by which I judged all moral or ethical living. Now, because they seemed to be mostly ignored, and because they were only in the Judaic-Christian Bible, I began to question whether they had validity or not. The matter was important to me in the light of many contrary things I had been reading. I have long forgotten what aspects of psychology, history and

philosophy they were that I was then reading. One of the critical claims was that such commandments are arrived at by human beings who see society is better off for them, but that they have no essential being or validity. To forbid murder, theft, lying and coveting all make for a better society in which to live; even having respect for one god, as against many gods, the variety of which present integration of the society before a single deity. Whilst it seemed that universally these laws would make for a better society, it did not mean they were divinely given, or could not be transcended. The mutual security of human beings in a society in which such laws were the standard augured well for that society. My mind was alert enough to know that if the laws were not God-given, then they had no essential validity for humanity. If they were man-made, then murder, rape, theft and adultery were not essentially, intrinsically wrong. They were simply social buffers against a total and all-out criminal way of living. Whilst it might matter much if you transgressed such laws in a given society, yet there was no essential evil if one refused to live by them. Murder, theft, adultery were not necessarily wrong. As a matter of fact, I asked myself, is anything 'right' or 'wrong' essentially, or only so because society says so.

You may well be right if you think my reasoning was not of any great depth, and certainly was not new. To me it was most significant, and I will try to explain why. All the time I had lived in the POW Camp, I had kept what I understood

as my moral and ethical integrity. That might not seem any special feat worthy of praise, but when you live with the ache of semi-starvation; when your mind and stomach long for extra food; when you would like the security of having possessions and money; then temptation to achieve some of this is very strong. The only way of doing this is to take part in rackets and the black-market. Those who think that what I am saying is merely prison introspection should endeavour to get a copy of *King Rat* written by James Clavell, and read it from cover to cover. By contrast they should read *Miracle on the River Kwai* by Earnest Gordon. Both of these books will confirm that human depravity was a very real thing which showed up blatantly under certain stresses. Gordon's book will show something not only of depravity, but also of great hope for the human race, and of this I wish to speak in this account you are now reading.

The Desperate State of the Starved, Weak and Worn Prisoners

Let me repeat something of what I have written above in order to show the almost intolerable pressures that were upon us. We were, many of us, in states of semi-starvation. We had been imprisoned, separated from our homeland, culture and our loved ones. It seemed that we would all eventually be massacred rather than that our Japanese captors would ever surrender or give

us up. In fact, that was what actually happened in some areas of Japanese military occupation during the last days of the war. We lived with that sense of personal failure because we had lost the war. The work most of us had to do drained us physically and emotionally. Sickness and disease had ravaged most. Comrades were dying, almost daily. The war news was not encouraging. Most of all we were desperately hungry, and we possessed almost no clothing. Our beds were infested with bedbugs. Some of us had to live with barely healed wounds, and some with loss of limbs, or with limbs that were maimed. Not all those who had control of the receiving of food rations, the cooking and supplying of them to their fellow-prisoners were to be trusted, since they, too, were not infallible. Some even waited intently whilst a person died in order to be able to devour the ration he had been unable to eat. I can only say that if you are a reader who has not been in these conditions, then you cannot pass off the intensity of the thought which came to me, and to others who were in a similar position. You must seek to understand the conditions which make necessary the kind of thinking some of us had. Let me add that I had written down some of the atrocious things men did because I knew I would not believe, later, that these acts had been committed. Then, rather than keep them as a record against humanity, I destroyed my own writings.

I might add in passing that not all thought as I thought, or as others who were like-minded

with me. Persons like 'King Rat' would have considered my kind of reasoning as ludicrous. 'Every man for himself!' would have been his philosophy. Laying down a life for a friend would have been an idea far beyond his comprehension. Even the general run of fellows would have thought it practical to get involved in one racket or another, and would not have even thought there were ethical principles involved. Some of my friends in the Army—men who were in the POW Camps—who have read such things as these I am writing, may still wonder whether I was real or not in those dreadful days. Even so, the minds of the loving men described in *Miracle on the River Kwai* were identical with mine, and one did not have to be at that place in order to do the grand things they did.

Even so, I am appealing to the reader to see that the issue which we are discussing is one which affects the whole world. That is why the law had to be considered. Was it of Man or of God? The reason why the answer to this question was to mean so much to me was that I was being driven to make a choice, one way or the other. I was either on the edge of discovering the reality of law and of God, or I was about to join those who had no scruples in regard to doing anything which would help them to live, no matter what they might think later, looking back; that is, if ever they were saved from their Japanese captors and returned to the Christian ethical standards of the countries from which they had come. It is a universal fact that we know we are

culpable of sin and wrong doing when we admit to a law or a standard higher than the one we have just carried out. Children instinctively know the uneasiness of guilt when they transgress.

What I want us to see is that either the human race has law given from above or law is only humanly conceived and therefore is not essentially binding on anyone. Law may be kept because of threatened punishment or opposed because of a contrary spirit, but its reality is recognised. It is simply the source or origin of law which here concerns us. It concerned me strongly at that time. It seemed to me that anarchy had as much validity as law if the moral law had been composed by human thinking alone.

The Personal Power and the Moral Test

My rank in the Army was that of a sergeant. I had been a theological student in a College when I applied for the Army. I believe it could be properly said that I had a theological mind. I was humorously called 'the battling Padre' in my military unit although I was not a chaplain. On the whole, the men of our Signals had certain faith values. I believe I was trusted to do the right thing.

In our POW Camp the sergeants ate together. We would sit around a table. Firstly we lined up for food with the men of other ranks, and then we sat together, though not always. For purposes of this story I will say we sat together day

by day and knew each other quite well. We would collect our portion of thin vegetable soup, a small amount of rice, and on our table there would be what we sometimes called 'rice cakes' and at other times 'doovers', the word derived from the French *hors d'oeuvre*. The cook would take a handful of cooked rice, squeeze it together, shape it a little and drop it into hot palm oil. Probably no two doovers were of the same size. We would look at the plate of them set before us, the ration being one for each of us. Our eyes, sharpened in sight by hunger, would immediately size up the largest, and the smallest. We always had a complicated moral problem, and I would like you—the reader—to give close attention to it.

The person who made the first choice would naturally wish to pick the largest doover. In principle—and I mean, in principle—he would be selfish in doing this. If he took the smallest doover, then he would be liked by all, so being liked was a form of self-gain—in principle. If he took the smallest because he feared the criticism of others, then that, too, was a self-saving act, in principle. If, as a reader who scorns this matter of choices, you are critical of what seems to be pettifogging reasoning, then let me refer you to our desperate condition, such as I have outlined under the heading above—'The Desperate State of the Starved, Weak and Worn Prisoners'. Read it, and try to put yourself into that fearful state.

As I would look each day at the size of those rice cakes, I sought as unobtrusively as possible

to take the smallest cake, though my stomach cried out for the largest. I had begun to realise one significant fact; namely that I had had moral assets throughout the twelve months of my so-called spiritual pilgrimage or search for truth. These assets aided me to do what I thought was the right thing. The question, of whether law originated from Man or God, now came strongly to me. As I said, if law was from Man, then neither anarchy nor the principle of law would matter the slightest. If law was from God, then it mattered totally! According to my Christian training, law came from God, but I was questioning this. According to humanist thinking, law derived from human thinking and, for that matter, had no essential moral authority. If the latter claim were the case, then I had wasted eighteen months clinging to an outworn ethic.

What I knew was that my moral assets—power to make a choice contrary to common sense and the saving of my life—had by this point completely run out. I was determined to come to a conclusion: indeed I was driven to it. This very day I would have to make the choice which would determine my future behaviour in life. In my mind had been the statement of Christ, which continually confronted me, 'Greater love has no Man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'. Taking the smallest cake—and living in every situation by this principle—meant, in essence, that one was laying down one's life for his friends. To take the largest cake and always act on this principle meant, in some

sense, contributing to the death of one's friends. Everything in my body and self-saving thinking rose up to save my life—in principle—by deliberately taking the largest rice cake.

I said silently as I sat with others at that table, 'God, if You exist, then give me the moral power to take the smallest cake without seeking the men's praise, or fearing their dislike, or myself wanting to be someone. If You do not give that power now, then I will not believe You have created the law. I will not believe in You'.

I know that God gave me the power to gladly take the smallest one, and not to regret having to do it. I knew, then, that He does exist and that in a very ordinary way one can lay down one's life for one's friends. I have since come to believe that no one can be an atheist, and I have also realised in my most dreadful moments of that year's crisis of faith He must have been present.

In a couple of paragraphs I have described in an ordinary way the experience I had which resolved the matter of law for me, but then it was no ordinary experience. It was most powerful, most terrible, and yet most wonderful. Fifty-five years after the event I can still feel the wonderful relief that came to me, the high joy and the assurance that law is the central fact of creation. Without law, I saw, it is impossible to speak of love and other such things.¹

¹ See my two books, *Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold* (NCPI, 1995) and *The Law of Eternal Delight* (NCPI to be published in 2000), for studies on the Law of God. The latter book has a good bibliography.

The Story Imagined or Real?

I am aware of the protest this story will bring from readers who would quickly rationalise my experience on all kinds of grounds. Just let them be under the same conditions, see under the same conditions and act under those conditions: they would quickly find out only the power of God can make the action real, and *continue to do so*—even to this very present!

That not only gave me a new sight of God and of His love, of humanity and their need, of myself and the moral power a human being can know from God. Once the law was established in my understanding as an unchanging reality, then all life became intelligible. The looters of the hospital drugs and food store were not just law-breakers, although they were certainly that. They were persons who would always have to live with the guilt of that act, no matter how they rationalised their act to their conscience. Law-breaking, too, must have its judgment, sooner or later. Human beings are sinners, transgressing God's law. The law makes human beings into responsible moral agents, and accountable for everything they do, notwithstanding the influences heredity, circumstances, environment and parental upbringing have upon us all. Man is a high creature: he is an accountable one.

When I understood law to this degree, I saw that God's grace in sending His Son to be the universal sacrifice for human sins made immense sense and revealed incredible love. The words of the Scriptures and the liturgies of worshipping believers now made a lot of sense. Also, I saw the way in which human beings can live together—not by the skulduggery of this world's King Rats, but by the pattern of love and service set out in Gordon's *Miracle on the River Kwai*. All the moral and spiritual cargo I had jettisoned during my crisis of faith, I now hauled back into my vessel of life. The Bible made immense sense.

It was about that time when I realised what my friend had meant when he said I was about the biggest egotist he had ever met. My anger at human depravity meant that I was critical of almost all men. The incredible fact was that I was not critical of myself! My experience of my moral bankruptcy over the matter of the rice cakes showed me that but for the spiritual and moral training I had had as a child, boy and young Man, I would have been as much immersed in the evil and wrong things others did. Not being in them did not give me the right to self-righteousness. What I did not do in practice did not mean that, in the thought kingdom of my mind, I was not as sinful as others. Self-righteousness is sheer egotism, as it is also moral elitism—the deceit that one is better than another, or all others!

I also need to say here that it was gradually coming to my understanding at the end of our

Prisoner of War days that I needed a further development in my theology of both God and Man. As we were demobbed from the Army, it was dawning on me that whilst Man is a totally depraved creature, yet, at the same time, he is still to a great degree in the image of God. This would take a long explanation to cover my thought which has extended right up to these present days. My short explanation is this; namely that in POW days we saw remarkable happenings of a lovely kind. I think the best stories come from the Burma–Thailand experience of the men who lived under excruciating circumstances. As in the war, so in this semi-peace in which we lived, great sacrifices were made, deeds were done which can only be explained by the fact that Man is still—in some way and some measure—in the image of God. On the other hand there was self-saving and self-raising actions which constitute selfishness of the worst kind.

We would ask how such things can be, and the answer must be that Man is in the image of God even while he is depraved. At times beautiful things will emerge from him, and at other times ugly things. He is neither a devil nor an angel, but just a human being fallen from perfection, but sometimes the gold of the image of God shows through, whilst at other times horrific evil can be enacted. I have learned that we must not look for his evil, as though he were *only* evil, but seek to encourage him that—given and taking the opportunity he has—he will recognise what he can be through the love of God in

Christ. This takes away being shocked and repelled by human activity, and it also takes away the lurking suspicion—and expectation—that he, Man, will only do evil. One can have great joy in the human race and in one's own humanity, especially as it lives in community with the God of all creation.

**A Conclusion to a Crisis:
The True Point of the Story**

I would like, now, to show two contrasts. The first experience I tell was what happened after I eventually returned to the theological college in which I had begun my training. Once, in our years as students, we had to conduct a service and preach a sermon in the college chapel. Taking the love-song written by Paul in his Letter of I Corinthians chapter 13, I told the staff and students my experience of the story of the rice cakes, and then pressed home the injunction to love in this way. I was shocked by the heavy criticism and ridicule I received from most of my hearers. Just a few understood. The others said, 'That is just being a Pharisee!' 'Doing that would make you feel self-righteous!' 'How legalistic!' Some were just scornful without voicing criticisms. It was as though I had opened my mind and heart, and I was thereafter seen and assessed on the telling of that story.

The second experience preceded the first. On Singapore Island our Convalescent Depot was

transferred from Selarang Barracks—known as Changi Prisoner of War Camp—to Kranji Camp which had been occupied by Indian POWs for two years. We were to remain there for the next eighteen months. I had virtually this period of time to work out both practically and theologically my new understanding of law and love. It just happened that at Kranji a small group of us came together to study the Christian faith. I suppose I was the leader of this group which would meet together at nights in the X-ray unit where we would talk out our hearts and minds. I have recorded this happening in another book, but I remember we grew to be about thirty-six in number, and something quite similar to what happened at the River Kwai developed itself in Kranji. I imagine that few outside the group realised what was happening. We set out to serve each other, to care for each other, yet primarily to care for those outside our group, and try to give them comfort and help where we could. The scope was enormous, our resources were limited, yet strange things happened whereby resources for helping others came into our hands. I say no more than that. The value of that was that we knew we could go back into society in our homelands, being motivated by God's love, and doing things for others without seeking gain or praise.

I wanted to write this story in this way before time rushed by me and I failed to do so. Looking at what I have written, I realise its inadequacy to be a clear revelation of the Divine love which

flows through ordinary, fallible human beings. There was nothing unhealthy about our mutual love, nothing that could be linked with homosexuality or a sectarian spirit. We were just a group of quiet, loving people. When women from the English Services came into our Camp to help rehabilitate us, they were impressed by the men of our group. I say no more for fear of being charged with spiritual egotism. That was not the case, and I withhold stories which happened even though they could justify my claim.

The Story in Action

On coming home I was fascinated by the thought that I would fall in love and be married. I found very few young women who could understand what had happened to me and what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I found only one, Laurel, and we have been married for nearly fifty-three years. She did understand. Married, we went to the North Coast of New South Wales to live with those of the local community and quietly practise the love of God without appearing to be pious or religious. A little of that experience I have written into short stories and a novel or two. After some years I returned to the theological college, trained there with a great deal of delight, and we moved out into the life of a church, into missionary situations in another country, and have developed a ministry under the hand of God which we believe has at its

heart the principle of self-giving and others-serving, which I learned in the Prisoner of War Camps on Singapore Island.

There my story should end, but it is a story without end. I, along with my wife and family, have tried to teach, preach and witness to the truth of God in a living and practical fashion. Whether that has been accomplished I leave to both my friends and enemies to decide. I do not know. What I do know is that the law of God, which is the very law of Himself, and which He has marvellously passed on to us, continues to attract my attention and stimulate my mind and heart. I believe this law is not only *not* legal, but is also the powerful means of constantly receiving and living in the life of God. Anarchists, legalists and anti-law people are all missing out on the great adventure of true, human living. As one lives God's law of love, and has His love of law, so much life comes to freshen the human spirit and to empower it to share the life of God which is love: yes, and holy love. I have not only taught much regarding the law which is by no means opposed to God's grace, but I have also found it more and more covering my life. I am sure we need a revival of understanding the law of God, and exploring its beauties and its powers. What is fixed in my heart is the saying of Jesus, 'Even as I have loved you, you ought, also, to love one another'.