

Peace Child

By Don Richardson

Part 3

Chapter 16 CRISIS BY THE KRONKEL

In most cultures, training for war, if required, does not begin until the teen-age years. Among the Sawi, training for war begins in early childhood. I have often seen a father keep repeating a command to a three- or four-year-old son while the child ignores his father as if he were not there. Vainly the father will harangue and threaten—and then turn and boast to a friend that his son is truly *kwai*, “strong-willed.” And the son hears his father’s boast.

Every Sawi child knows that if he throws a violent enough tantrum, he will get his way. I have even seen young children who have not yet learned to swim throw themselves in the river to compel a parent or sibling to come running and pick them up.

On the rare occasion when a parent strikes a child with real intent to punish, the child will often strike back, or at least throw himself into convulsive rage to bend the parent’s will. The parent will accept this reaction, thus encouraging a similar response next time. Generally, punishing a child is frowned upon, and the reason given is *mesu furamake gani*, “in case you break his spirit.” Call it discipline-in-reverse.

The Sawi child is trained to obtain his will by sheer force of violence and temper. He is goaded constantly to take *otaham*, “revenge,” every time he is hurt or insulted. He has also the open example of his parents themselves as they carry out violent retaliation against everything that offends them, not to

mention the constant recitation of stories and legends which exalt violence and treachery as traditional obligations.

The end product, after sixteen to eighteen years of such programming, is a young man with a fighting instinct so deeply engrained that sometimes even a natural concern for self-preservation cannot suppress it. And in primeval southwest New Guinea, children raised by any other standard would quickly become the legitimate prey of their enemies.

It is not surprising, then, that whole villages of such men will bristle with spears and arrows at the mere drop of a word. Nor was it surprising, since we lived among *three* villages of such men, that we counted fourteen battles fought within sight of our home during the first two months we lived among the Sawi. After that we lost count.

This did not include run-of-the-mill family quarrels when a husband, for example, would punish his wife by shooting an arrow through her arm or through her leg. Or beat her across the back with a flaming faggot. Or force her to sit in a comer staring at the wall for days on end, striking her soundly every time she dared look around at her children or other relatives—a punishment, called *yukop hauhuyap*, usually inflicted on young wives whose eyes strayed too often in the direction of strange men.

We became accustomed to the almost daily sight of blood. To the drumming sound of feet hurrying to war. To the unified shouting of masses of angry men. To the rattle of bow-vines and the thud of clubs striking flesh. To the high-pitched screaming of women as they beat the frond walls of their longhouses with heavy sago digging sticks in thundering protest against some injustice. Had the Sawi and other tribes like them developed twentieth century war technology along with their subliminal killer-psyche, they might have been the scourge of half the earth. Trying to restrain such a culture from violence and counter-violence was like trying to force several hundred computers to give responses exactly opposite to those for which they were programmed.

Occasionally I had a measure of success. Like the time Atae announced that he was claiming Samani's only wife as his own third wife, and if Samani didn't like it he could step up and be killed. I climbed up into Atae's home, sat down with him by his fireplace and started reasoning with him about the judgment of God that would await him if he wronged Samani in this way. Atae sat there blinking in amazement as my words sank in. He had his bow and arrows ready across his lap, waiting for Samani to arrive for the showdown.

"If I, a Tuan, am happy with one wife, why do you need three?" I asked, using every kind of leverage I could think of. "Now that Jesus' words have come to you, you are more responsible than you were before. You will offend *Myao Kodon* terribly if you do this."

It worked. That haunting suspicion that perhaps the Tuan was linked with supernatural powers the Sawi had not yet discovered, plus the strong impression that the Tuan was not merely taking sides with Samani, but was also personally concerned for Atae's own good, won the day.

High noon arrived. Samani appeared, beside himself with fury. He was a thin, sickly man and would have been no match for Atae. To the astonishment of the village, Atae made a public oration retracting his earlier announcement. To save face, he made it clear he was changing his mind only "out of respect for Tuan Don." To my surprise, Atae and Samani soon became close friends. So also did Atae and I.

But it wasn't always that easy. There was the day our smiling friend Er nearly got himself killed. He had been making advances at a girl, when suddenly her father, uncles and brothers turned against him. Er had three arrows in his body before I could rescue him.

The MAF float plane was passing nearby, so I called pilot George Boggs and requested a medical flight to take Er to a mission hospital one hundred miles to the north, where the deeply embedded barb tips could be removed by surgery. Within ten minutes the aircraft had landed on the Kronkel, and by that time I had persuaded all of Er's relatives to allow Er to be flown out for surgery.

Or I thought I had. But as George took off down the *kidari*, taking Er into the unknown, I heard a shout of rage behind me. Er's older brother, Ama, drawing his bow, had an arrow aimed at me.

"You have sent my brother away!" he screeched. "I'll never see my brother again!" Before he could release his arrow, a flying tackle of several Sawi men bore him to the ground and quickly disarmed him.

A week or so later, MAF returned Er to us, healthy and happy, proudly displaying the three arrowtips which had somehow been removed from his flesh "while he slept." He also told astounding tales of soaring mountain peaks, of ground covered with stones—a rarity in the swamps, and of friendly Dani (Christian) tribesmen who had welcomed him as if he were a brother. Later I overheard Ama, the one who had threatened me, trying to make a deal with another Sawi, saying, "Let's you and I wound each other so we can both go where Er went!"

Ama was also the one who now precipitated the most serious fighting we had yet seen after five months beside the Kronkel. Taking offense because a Haenam youth called him "lizard-skin," Ama rallied the young men of Kamur and attacked Haenam. Later the leading men of both villages also became involved, and this time it was clear they would not be turned aside until they had inflicted serious casualties on the opposite group.

For five months we had worked hard to forestall death by violence, not only for the lives involved, but also so our community of three villages might remain intact. We had bandaged dozens of bloody wounds, given hundreds of shots of penicillin, shouted till our throats were hoarse, prayed till our eyes were heavy with sleep, reasoned, cajoled, paid for emergency medical flights, and even interposed our own bodies as a final persuasion to break off hostilities. Yet still hatred between Haenam and Kamur kept swelling like an irresistible tide.

The imminent slaying of at least one person, followed by a dispersal of the three villages and the commencement of a long blood-feud, now seemed

unavoidable. So daily I pleaded with the leading men of Haenam and Kamur to make peace, but they would not listen. Fortunately, Hadi's village, Yohwi, remained largely uninvolved.

Suddenly one day a new thought stopped me in my tracks. You keep urging them to make peace, I said to myself, on the assumption that peace is possible for these people. Peace, however, requires assurance of sincere good will on both sides.

But among the Sawi, where *tuwi asonai man* is a constant possibility, can there ever be assurance of sincere good will? Each side knows perfectly the other side's capacity for using friendship as a means of treachery. Each side knows also that at any time a *waness* bind can be used to close the mouths of even those who normally would stand by a peace agreement.

Now I thought I saw why, when I urged them to make peace, they replied, "Tuan, you just don't understand!" Now I understood that when treachery is philosophically justified, true peace is impossible. Long, long ago the ancestors of the Sawi had locked the entire culture into a ceaseless treadmill of war. Millenniums later, we had discovered the ancient treadmill still turning, the descendants still wearying themselves to keep from being ground under it. I wanted to let them off the treadmill. They had been on it long enough.

But I could see no way.

The thing that puzzled me was why there were any Sawi left at all. With infant mortality higher than fifty percent, and an average life span probably lower than twenty-five years, they could hardly afford to kill each other in addition to the losses they suffered to the Asmat, the Kayagar, and disease. And yet they were bent on doing just that!

I concluded that possibly their habit of living in small, isolated groups had been the key to their survival. With potential enemies out of sight, there were fewer occasions to shed blood. Contagious diseases spread more slowly through a widely scattered population. People were more dependent on each other in

small communities, and thus placed a higher premium on each other's lives. It was also easier for small groups to hide from outside enemies.

I concluded further that Carol and I had unintentionally deprived Haenam, Kamur and Yohwi of the mutual isolation they needed to survive in relative peace, by drawing them together into one community. It followed that for the good of the people, we ought to leave them. It would be a bitter pill to swallow, but I knew without us, they would scatter to their deep jungle homes and be at peace. In the meantime we could try to reach other Sawi communities to the north, hopefully returning later to minister to Haenam, Kamur and Yohwi individually on an itinerant basis.

Carol and I prayed together about this course of action, and then I went out to talk with the men in the man houses of both Haenam and Kamur. "Since you cannot make peace with each other," I said, "it is clear to us that we ought to leave you. If we stay here, it is only a matter of time until men are killed, and then you will be locked in a blood-feud which may take still more lives.

There are other Sawi villages over on the Au River—Tamor, Sato, Ero and Hahami—we will go and see if they are living at peace with each other and try to teach them."

My words touched off a tumult of discussion in both manhouses. I returned to Carol, wondering—will Haenam and Kamur angrily blame each other for our decision to leave, and launch fresh attacks? Or would both villages decide that if we would no longer be their source of medicine and steel axes, perhaps they could find other uses for us? As darkness fell, we could still hear discussion raging in both man houses.

I was struggling against a dark Conradian despair, compounded both by the realization that Carol, now pregnant with our second child, would find moving into another jungle home a very difficult task, and that Stephen, sick with malaria, was growing pale and listless.

I had just turned off the pressure lamp when I heard a shout outside our back door. I took a flashlight and walked out onto the back porch. My beam revealed

the grim faces of a host of leading men from both warring factions —Kani, Mahaen, Maum, Hato, Kaiyo, Kigo and many others. “Tuan,” one of them pleaded solemnly, “don’t leave us!” “But I don’t want you to kill each other,” I replied.

“Tuan, we’re not going to kill each other.” The speaker paused, and steeled himself as he said, “Tuan, tomorrow we are going to make peace!”

Chapter 17 COOL WATER TOMORROW

“Make peace?” I echoed unbelievably. For what the speaker actually said was, “tomorrow we are going to sprinkle cool water on each other!”

“Cool water” is Sawi idiom for “peace.” Sprinkling cool water on each other could only mean “make peace.” But did they really mean it?

According to my analysis of their cultural predicament, it should not be possible for them to achieve more than a mutual standoff through sheer physical separation of forces, unless one side was gullible enough to trust the other completely, which was unlikely in view of well-remembered Sawi history. So either they were shamming it, or else my analysis was about to be exploded. I hoped for the latter. But I could not imagine what proof of sincerity they could give to rule out the possibility of *tuwi asonai man*.

We hardly slept that night, wondering what daybreak would bring. Few of the Sawi slept either. Through most of the night we could hear their voices murmuring under the shrill carrier signals of myriad cicadas.

As dawn returned color and life to brooding longhouses, the jungle and the shimmering river, Carol and I were watching from our window. Tangy smoke from cooking fires drifted up through thatch roofs, roosters crowed, dogs yelped, pigs groveled for sago crumbs under the longhouses. But hardly a man, woman or child could be seen. Apart from the animal noises, it was deathly quiet, just as it had often been before a battle.

Then we saw Mahaen and his oldest wife climb down from their longhouse in Haenam and head toward Kamur. Now other people from Haenam—men, women and children—climbed down also and stood silently watching as Mahaen and his wife moved away from them. Mahaen was carrying a child, one of his own sons, on his back. His wife, Syado, was sobbing violently. Carol and I moved tensely out onto our porch.

Now the people of Kamur were descending en masse from their longhouses also. Tension mounted as hundreds of eyes, including our own, followed the progress of Mahaen and his weeping wife. The trio was closer to us now, and Carol touched my arm apprehensively as we both saw the grim determination on Mahaen’s face and the tears streaming from Syado’s eyes. The child clinging to Mahaen’s neck seemed passive and unaware of anything unusual.

The woman Syado looked over Mahaen’s shoulder and saw the people of Kamur massed and waiting, staring at the three in anticipation. She began to shudder convulsively either from fear or deep sorrow, we were not sure which. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she suddenly wrenched the little boy from her husband’s shoulders and bore him swiftly back toward Haenam, screaming as she ran.

Mahaen raced after her, trying to wrest the child from her arms, but Syado clung to the little boy with a strength born of desperation. Mahaen’s oldest son, Giriman, ran forward from the crowd and intervened on his mother’s behalf. With a roar of frustration Mahaen turned his back on them both and stalked back and forth in front of Haenam, shouting something unintelligible to us.

Clearly, Syado and Giriman had impeded his purpose, whatever it was. Now suddenly other women of Haenam were clutching their babies close to their breasts, crying out in apprehension. Men were running back and forth, gesturing, shouting. The village was in turmoil.

A loud shout from Kamur drew our attention. Something was happening in the center of the village. Leaving Carol on our porch, I ran to a better vantage point and watched intently. I saw a man named Sinau raise a little baby boy over his head for all to see. Then, his features contorted with unspeakable anguish, Sinau handed the child to his brother, Atae. "I can't bear to hand him over myself!" he cried. "Atae, you do it for me!"

Atae took the baby and strode purposefully toward Haenam. But Sinau, the father, could not turn his eyes away from the helpless form of his baby son. The baby was like a powerful magnet drawing him.

Eyes brimming with tears, fingers writhing in despair, Sinau suddenly leaped toward the child, shouting, "I've changed my mind! I can't let him go!" Sinau snatched his little son out of Atae's arms. No one seemed to blame him. But neither did the uproar cease.

Strange, opposing forces of attraction and repulsion were building up an incredible tension between Haenam and Kamur. From my vantage point between the two villages, I could feel those forces crackling around me with an almost physical violence. The hair on the back of my neck began to crawl as I observed both villages in complete turmoil, as if travailing over some momentous plan that couldn't quite come to birth. Then out of the corner of my eye, I half-noticed a husky Kamur man named Kaiyo turn away from the crowd and climb up quickly into his longhouse.

Kaiyo's heart was pounding as he slipped away from his wife, Wumi, and ascended the stairpole into his home. Mahaen had failed! Sinau had failed! Both Mahaen and Sinau had many children, yet neither could bring himself to give even one.

Kaiyo had only one child, six-month-old Biakadon—lying there on the grass mat. Kaiyo approached the baby tensely, his heart wrenching within him at the

thought of what he was about to do. Biakadon looked up at his father and smiled in recognition. He doubled his tiny brown fists and waved his arms in anticipation of being picked up.

"It's necessary," Kaiyo reminded himself. "There's no other way to stop the fighting. And if the fighting does not stop the Tuan will leave."

Kaiyo reached down and picked up Biakadon. Alone in the empty longhouse, he held the soft, warm, gurgling body of his son close to his chest one last time. He thought of the grief his deed would bring to Wumi, but there was no other way. Kaiyo looked toward the bright doorway at the far end of the longhouse, and began to walk toward it, his limbs trembling, his visage contorted by the conflicting emotions raging within him.

Biakadon's mother, Wumi, stood in the midst of the jostling, shouting crowd, absorbed in the common suspense of wondering whether there would be peace or not. Naturally if anyone would bring himself to the point of handing over a child, it would be someone who had many children and therefore would not miss one of them too badly. That was the reason it was out of the question for Wumi and Kaiyo to consider giving Biakadon.

"But," she wondered, "where is Kaiyo?" He had been standing right there beside her a few moments before. With a twinge of unease, Wumi's black eyes flashed toward the longhouse, just in time to see her husband leap down from the far end and begin running toward Haenam with Biakadon in his arms!

For a moment Wumi stood frozen with shock and disbelief, telling herself it was only a coincidence that Kaiyo was heading that way with Biakadon. Then suddenly the knowledge that it was not a coincidence struck her with crushing weight. Wumi screamed and ran after Kaiyo, pleading with all the force of her soul.

But Kaiyo never looked back. His broad back kept growing smaller with distance as he raced ahead of her. Wumi felt her feet sinking in the mire of a small bog. In her anguish she had missed the trail.

There was no hope now. He was too far ahead. He had almost reached the waiting crowd among the Haenam longhouses. Even the hope that at the last second he would turn back of his own volition was gone.

With a piteous cry, Wumi let herself collapse into the slime in which she had become mired. Writhing uncontrollably, she kept repeating plaintively, “Biakadon! Biakadon, my son!”

I do not know a time when I have felt more intense sympathy for a fellow human being than I felt for Wumi at that moment. Glancing toward our home, I saw Carol holding Stephen tightly in her arms. I knew she was doing just what I was doing—feeling deeply Wumi’s sorrow because of what our own son meant to us. Stephen looked up in amazement at the tears trickling down Carol’s cheeks.

At the same time, two other emotions overwhelmed even our pity for Wumi. One was our concern for Biakadon. What fate awaited him?

Tearing myself away from the heart-rending spectacle of Wumi’s sorrow, I followed Kaiyo toward Haenam. Thoughts of Canaanitic child sacrifices came to mind, and I decided if Biakadon’s life was in danger I would use every power at my command to rescue him and return him safely to his mother.

The second emotion was intense curiosity. What were they doing? Why was it necessary?

The intensity of Wumi’s sorrow belied my hope that Biakadon would soon be returned to her, implying that Kaiyo’s action, whatever its purpose, was irreversible.

Kaiyo’s chest was heaving with emotion as he reached the edge of Haenam. The leading men of the village were massed in front of him now, expectantly eyeing the child Kaiyo held in his hands. Kaiyo scanned the row of enemy faces before him. Maum, Kani, Mahaen, Nair—they were all there.

Then he saw the man he had chosen and called his name. “Mahor!” he cried.

Mahor leaped forward, his eyes bright with emotion. Kaiyo and Mahor drew near to each other. All the men, women and children of Haenam were crowding closer, their faces bright with anticipation. Behind him, Kaiyo could hear the roar of excitement from the people of his own village who were watching from a distance.

Kaiyo and Mahor stood face to face.

“Mahor!” Kaiyo challenged. “Will you plead the words of Kamur among your people?”

“Yes!” Mahor responded, “I will plead the words of Kamur among my people!”

“Then I give you my son and with him my name!” Kaiyo held forth little Biakadon, and Mahor received him gently into his arms.

Mahor shouted, “*Eehaa!* It is enough! I will surely plead for peace between us!”

Both villages thundered forth a series of *hahap kamans* until the very earth itself seemed to quiver with emotion. People now began calling Mahor by Kaiyo’s name.

Suddenly Mahaen reappeared in the forefront of the crowd. Facing Kaiyo, Mahaen held aloft one of his other baby sons and cried, “Kaiyo! Will you plead the words of Haenam among your people?”

“Yes!” cried Kaiyo, holding out his hands toward Mahaen.

“Then I give you my son and with him my name!” As Kaiyo took the little boy, Mani, from Mahaen, a sudden cry of despair broke out from the back of the throng. Close relatives of the child had just realized what was happening.

Kaiyo was about to respond to Mahaen’s gift when Mahaen urged him. “Go! Go quickly!” Kaiyo wheeled around and fled toward Kamur with his newly adopted son, Mani. Close relatives of the child tried in vain to overtake him.

As Kaiyo departed, Mahor shouted an invitation to the entire population of Haenam. “*Ini tim ke kanenai arkivi demake, ysyny asimdien!* Those who accept this child as a basis for peace, come and lay hands on him!”

Young and old alike, male and female, filed eagerly past Mahor and laid their hands in turn upon tiny Biakadon, sealing their acceptance of peace with Kamur. The same ceremony took place in Kamur as soon as Kaiyo returned with Mahaen's baby in his hands. Kaiyo now began to go by the name of Mahaen. Wumi meanwhile dragged herself out of the bog and staggered toward her home, weeping. A beautiful woman, she had now become a lonely, sorrowing specter, caked from head to foot in drying mud. Her cries were echoed by the moaning of those similarly bereaved in Haenam. Older women related to Wumi now came and wept with her in a vain attempt to assuage her grief. Biakadon and Mani, meanwhile, were carried up into the manhouses in their respective adopted villages to be decorated for a peace celebration. It was the first time I could recall seeing so many Sawi men gathered together without a single weapon of war on their persons.

While the babies were being adorned, young men stuck feathers in their hair, brought out their drums, and began to dance. I managed to draw one of them aside. I had some questions to ask.

The young man's name was Ari. Exuberantly, he explained what had taken place. "Kaiyo has given his son to Haenam as a *tarop tim*, a peace child, and Mahaen in return has given a *tarop tim* to us!"

"Why is this necessary?" I asked.

"Tuan, you've been urging us to make peace—don't you know it's impossible to have peace without a *peace child*?"

I must have seemed very ignorant as I shook my head.

Ari was astounded. "Do you mean," he queried, "that you Tuans are able to make peace without. . . ?"

He paused a moment in deep thought, and then suddenly his face brightened with insight. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "I understand now. You Tuans never war with each other, so of course you don't need a peace child."

When Ari said that, a tiny bell started tinkling somewhere deep inside me. But it was very indistinct. I hardly paid any attention to it.

I was still reeling mentally under the shock of what I had witnessed. Still aching with pity for Kaiyo, Wumi, Biakadon, and the others. Still amazed at the fiery motivation and consummate strength of will which could move two such men to the superhuman subordination of parental instinct I had observed. Still electrified by the sudden vaporization of the atmosphere of war and hardly daring to believe the new beginning tingling in the air.

The voices of the young dancers rang out sharp and clear and joyful above the staccato roll of their drums. They made me aware that after six months of horror, shock and tension, I had virtually forgotten how to feel light and cheery. But was it right to feel light and cheery at Wumi's and Kaiyo's and Mahaen's expense? "Tuan, you don't understand . . ." they had warned.

If I had known my call for peace would provoke fathers to give up their sons, plunge mothers into grief, and cast babies into strangeness, what would I have chosen? To let the mothers continue suckling what their own wombs have borne, or to let violent men go ahead and kill each other? I had no answer. But three hundred Sawi had laid hands on a peace child. And they were singing. And laughing. And inside me, the little bell was ringing a little louder.

"What will happen to Biakadon and Mani?" I asked. "Will they be harmed?" I was still on guard lest the joy these unpredictable people were expressing was only a deceptive prelude to human sacrifice. Or in case later, if someone violated the peace agreement, Biakadon and Mani might be slaughtered as hostages.

Ari hastened to reassure me. "They will not be harmed, Tuan," he said. "In fact, both our villages will guard the lives of these *tarop* children even more zealously than they protect their own offspring. For if Biakadon dies, Kamur will no longer be bound to a peace agreement with Haenam. And if Mani dies, Haenam will no longer be bound to a peace agreement with us."

I was both relieved and concerned. Relieved to know the two babies were in no danger of mistreatment. Concerned, because with infant mortality rates so

high, the peace that had just been purchased at such high cost in human feeling could be lost before it had barely begun. An accidental fall into the river, a chance encounter with a death adder, or a sudden attack of cerebral malaria, and the awesome sacrifice would be rendered invalid, the parental agony ineffectual.

So, I mused—this peace depends upon the continuing life of the peace child involved. The little bell in my subconscious gave an extra loud ring that almost caught my attention.

The two babies were now fully adorned with tiny armbands and legbands of braided vine, to which golden tassels of twisted palm fibers were tied. Watiro, one of the leading women of Kamur, came forth from her village holding little Mani in her arms. She stood tall and erect on a knoll of high ground facing Haenam. Likewise, a leading woman of Haenam came forth with tiny Biakadon and faced Watiro at a distance of about fifty yards.

Suddenly the men and boys of Kamur surged past Watiro, beating their drums and singing. A corresponding throng erupted from the center of Haenam, advancing past their newly adopted peace child until they confronted their former enemies halfway between the two villages. They were all smiling at each other. Even relentless Ama now was smiling at Huyaham who had insulted him.

While the drums continued their steady throb, various individuals made their way forward from both groups and exchanged gifts such as axes, machetes, knives, shells, or necklaces of animal teeth. I learned that those who exchanged gifts also exchanged names.

Every man in Kamur obtained a Haenam name in addition to his own. Henceforth when someone from Haenam addressed him, they would call him by his *Haenam* name, indicating they no longer regarded him as a stranger, but

accepted him as readily as they would accept the native son whose name he bore.

Conversely, people of Kamur would address citizens of Haenam by their *Kamur* names, accepting them as if they actually were the Kamur personages whose names they bore. To make the cross-identification easier, names were exchanged between persons of approximately equal stature and reputation.

Once the exchanging of gifts and the trading of names was completed, a strange dance ensued. First the men of Kamur assembled in a tight group while the men of Haenam whirled around them in a close circle. Then the men of Haenam spun off to one side and stood in another group while Kamur encircled them. At length the dance climaxed into a wild outburst of ecstatic shouting. I named this the you-in-me-I-in-you dance. It symbolized the mutual peace-embrace of the two villages. The bell in the cellars of my mind was clanging louder now, impatient for me to recognize its message.

As Kamur and Haenam concluded the historic celebration by bearing their living, breathing peace tokens home in triumph, I called Narai and my other language informants to my office and sat down with them for a long, penetrating discussion.

The corrected picture was emerging. I had thought of the Sawi culture as based on a single pillar—a total idealization of violence, with its awesome manifestations of treachery, headhunting and cannibalism, aided when necessary by the inscrutable *waness* bind. In this view, peace could never be established, for goodwill could have no credibility in the context of *tuwi asonai man* and the *waness* bind. Self-annihilation of the violence-honoring culture was prevented only by its fragmentation into small, mutually isolated communities.

The theory had seemed logical, watertight—yet somewhere in prehistory the ancestors of the Sawi had accomplished what the theory said could not be done. They had found a way to prove sincerity and establish peace even in the dread context of *tuwi asonai man* and the *waness bind*! Among the Sawi, every demonstration of friendship was suspect except one. *If a man would actually give his own son to his enemies, that man could be trusted!* That, and that alone, was a proof of goodwill no shadow of cynicism could discredit. *And everyone who laid his hand on the given son was bound not to work violence against those who gave him, nor to employ the waness bind for their destruction.* The little bell clanged again, and this time it caught my attention. I perceived its message and gasped! This was the key we had been praying for!

Chapter 18 STILLNESS IN THE MAN HOUSE

As I approached the Haenam-Yohwi man house, notes in hand, I stopped to watch some Sawi children at play. A few stood in dugout canoes and splashed each other by slapping their paddles on the surface of the Kronkel. Others were diving from the branches of a clump of *ahos* trees into the Tumdu, their slim, wet bodies glistening as they arced in the sun, their laughter rippling like the waves they created.

We had enjoyed two months of peace—the *tarop* was working! Only once did we fear the peace might break down. A pig belonging to Kamur had been killed mysteriously not far from the village. The pig's owner suspected that someone from Haenam had been involved. Enraged, he and some of his friends took their weapons and started toward Haenam when suddenly Kaiyo intervened.

As the one who had received a peace child from Haenam, Kaiyo possessed the acknowledged right to adjudicate all grievances between Haenam and Kamur. Approaching the potential treaty-breakers, Kaiyo had reached out and gripped

their leader by his earlobes! I expected the fellow to react violently to this indignity, but instead he accepted it! He actually stopped in his tracks and lowered his bow, listening to Kaiyo's plea.

Meanwhile someone came running with Mani, the peace child adopted from Haenam, and held him in front of Kaiyo. Letting go of the man's earlobes, Kaiyo laid his hands on little Mani and said, "*Tarop tim titindakeden!* I plead the peace child!" Kaiyo continued, "If this child had died you would be free to do what you want to do. But he is not dead. He is still alive, and I am here as Haenam's *raendep hobhan*, 'advocate.' You may not fight against Haenam! My hand is strong!"

Whereupon Kaiyo returned his hands to the man's earlobes and began tugging at them. The man then turned and walked meekly back to his own house followed by his friends. If the aggrieved persons had remained hostile, Kaiyo would have severed their bowstrings, cut off the tips of any spears they might have tried to use, and thrown any other weapons in the river.

Once the aggrieved persons had returned to their homes, Kaiyo had thoroughly investigated the possibility that someone from Haenam had killed the pig. Finally both villages concluded the pig had been killed by a spy from one of several other communities bearing malice toward Kamur. The crisis had been averted. The *tarop* custom had proved itself. The living peace child was indeed a culturally built-in antidote to the Sawi idealization of violence. The agony of Kaiyo, Mahaen and the two mothers had indeed purged all emotion of war from the two communities.

There were two pillars, not one, supporting the structure. Throughout their history, the Sawi had leaned first on one pillar and then on the other. Collectively, they were like a man standing on one leg until it gets tired, then shifting to the other leg.

For two months I had been scrutinizing every aspect of the second pillar, assimilating its abstract vocabulary, preparing a strategy. Now, as I climbed up

into the Haenam-Yohwi manhouse, I felt again a wave of that bracing excitement which was more than just my own.

“You saw how horrified I was when Kaiyo gave you Biakadon,” I said, snapping alternate fingers as the Sawi do at a point of tension. “When I saw Wumi writhing out her sorrow in the mud, I was almost ready to rush in among you, seize Biakadon, and give him back to his mother.”

Mahaen, Mahor and others sat in silence, tracking my line of thought.

“I kept saying to myself, ‘O that they could make peace without this painful giving of a son!’ But you kept saying, ‘There is no other way!’” I leaned forward and placed my right hand palm down on the sagofrond floor. “You were right!”

Every eye in the man house was fixed upon me.

“When I stopped to think about it, I realized you and your ancestors are not the only ones who found that peace required a peace child. *Myao Kodon*, the Spirit whose message I bear, has declared the same thing—true peace can never come without a peace child! Never!”

Somehow the Sawi had forgotten the formality of repeating everything I said. It didn’t seem necessary now. They had stopped thinking of me as a visitor in their man house.

“Because *Myao Kodon* wants men to find peace with Him and with each other, He decided to choose a once-for-all *tarop* child good enough and strong enough to establish peace, not just for a while, but forever! The problem was, whom should He choose? For among all human children, there was no son good enough or strong enough to be an eternal *tarop*.” I paused and searched their faces. Their curiosity level was rising.

“Whoever did He choose?” asked Mahaen, toasting a stick of beetle grubs over his cooking fire.

I answered with another question. “Did Kaiyo give another man’s son, or his own?”

“He gave his own,” they replied.

“Did you, Mahaen, give another man’s son, or your own?”

“I gave my own,” he replied, remembering the agony.

“So did God!” I exclaimed, following suddenly on Mahaen’s reply and then looking sideways at the wall, a gesture meaning “think about that!”

I continued, “Like Kaiyo, God had only one Son to give, and like Kaiyo, He gave Him anyway! The child you gave, Mahaen, was no cast-off you wanted to get rid of—he was your *beloved* son. But the Son God gave was even more beloved!”

Mahaen twitched his nose, a way of saying, “I understand.”

“I have noticed how you respect words passed down from the ancestors. Hear now what ancestors of the Tuans say about the *Tarop* Child from God.”

I opened an English Bible and translated part of Isaiah’s prophecy into Sawi: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince—*Tarop*— of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”

And again from John’s Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!”¹

The men leaned forward, gazing at the strange little “cluster of leaves” lying open in my hand, amazed at the message that had been trapped inside it and at my ability to spring that message out of it for them.

Mahaen looked at me and asked, “Is He the one you’ve been telling us about? *Yesus*?”

“He’s the very one!” I replied.

“But you said a friend betrayed Him—if *Yesus* was a *Tarop*, it was very wrong to betray Him. We have a name for that. We call it *tarop gaman*. It’s the worst thing anyone could do!”

“You’re right again,” I said, looking Mahaen in the eye. “Despising the *Tarop* child of God *is* the worst thing anyone can do!”

I mused inwardly. Before this moment Judas had been a super-Sawi. Now he was a villain.

“Tell us more,” Mahaen said, laying aside his stick of toasted beetle grubs.

A few hours later I was repeating the same message in the manhouse of Kamur. “When you, Kaiyo, gave Biakadon, it was to sprinkle cool water on just *one* village—Haenam. Mahaen gave you Mani to make peace with just *one* village—your own. But Jesus is not a *Tarop* for one village only, but for *all* mankind—not only for Tuans, but for Asmat, Kayagar, Auyu, Atohwaem, and yourselves as well!

“When you, Kaiyo, gave Biakadon, you were very selective in choosing the individual to whom you would entrust your son’s life. You chose the one you considered an ideal man—Mahor. But when *Myao Kodon* searched for a man worthy to receive His *Tarop*, He found no one! We were all unworthy of God’s Peace Child. But did *Myao Kodon* say, ‘I cannot give My Son because they are all unworthy?’”

Solemn faces studied me through wreaths of smoke from cooking fires, waiting for the rhetorical answer.

“No, He did not. He actually said, ‘*Kwai fidaemakon!* I will give Him anyway!’”

I turned my attention again to Kaiyo. “Kaiyo, suppose someone had forewarned you that when you gave Biakadon, the people of Haenam would despise and even slay him—would you still have given him?” “Certainly not!” he replied.

“But in the case of Jesus,” I continued, “*Myao Kodon* knew beforehand that men would despise and even slay the Peace Child He sent to them.”

A look of sheer awe crept over Kaiyo’s face as he anticipated my next statement.

“But *Myao Kodon* loves us so much that. . . .”

There was stillness in the manhouse.

“ . . . He gave His Son freely even knowing men would despise and slay Him. In fact, through the wisdom of *Myao Kodon*, the men who shed the blood of

Jesus actually provided a *raendep*, ‘an atonement’ to quench God’s anger against men.

“They slew Him wickedly, but *Myao Kodon* was so *maraviap*, ‘ingenious,’ that even the very worst men could do only furthered His purpose! If it had not been so, there would be no hope for any of us.”

I was about to narrate the victorious resurrection of the Peace Child when I was interrupted by an anguished keening from Hato. The look on the one eyed patriarch’s face startled me. Stark sorrow.

Hato’s son, Amio, explained. “Not long before you came my father gave a peace child to the Kayagar. They took the baby and did not give one in return.”

Amio winced as he continued, “Later we heard they killed the baby and ate it.”

I drew in my breath sharply in horror. I reached out and touched Hato’s hand and felt my being flow together with his in a mute sharing of anguish.

Near the edge of our cell of sorrow Amio’s voice kept on explaining, “We learned then that Kayagar do not seal the peace by laying their hands on the living *tarop*, as we do, but by actually partaking of the *tarop* child’s flesh. That way an accidental death of the child does not end the peace, because he is still living *inside everyone!*”

“The people of Haenam and Yohwi chided us, saying, ‘You Kamur people don’t understand the Kayagar. You only understand the Auyu. If we had known you intended to give a *tarop* to the Kayagar, we would have warned you.’”

Someone else added, “That was the reason we almost started fighting with the Kayagar the day you arrived to build your home.”

Stunned by this complex of revelations, I sat musing in silence, when Hato’s voice came to me softly, “*Myao Kodon nohop kahane savos kysir nide?*”

My eyes welled at his words. He had said “*Myao Kodon* must have been sad just like me.”

The next day shadowy figures etched in smoke leaned forward to listen as I continued the same message in the somber manhouse of Seremeet village several miles downstream.

“In the case of a Sawi *tarop*,” I reasoned, “you receive him bodily into your home, and he becomes dependent upon you for care and protection. But in the case of God’s *Tarop*, no one receives Him bodily.”

“Then how can we receive Him?” asked an attentive listener named Morkay.

“You receive *Myao Kodon*’s Peace Child by welcoming His Spirit into your hearts,” I replied. “Then He becomes your Provider and Protector. And when the Spirit of Jesus dwells in your hearts, *Myao Kodon* will give you His *name* also. You will actually enter into a *hauwat*, ‘name-exchange’ relationship with the God of heaven and earth.

“He will link your names with the name of His Son and accept you for His sake. Then He will be in you, and you in Him, just as Kamur was in Haenam and Haenam in Kamur in their final peace dance!”

A murmur of discussion rustled along both sides of the long central corridor. As it gradually subsided, I rose to my feet to drive home the analogy as I had done in the man houses of Haenam and Kamur. Every eye looked up at me expectantly as I towered beside a rack piled high with drying firewood.

“For moons without number your ancestors gave their children to establish peace—not knowing *Myao Kodon* has already provided one perfect Peace Child for all men—His own Son! And because your children were not strong, peace could never last. The children died, and you lapsed back into war again. “That is the reason *Myao Kodon* sent me—to tell you about the Peace Child who is strong—the once-for-all *Tarop*, Jesus! From now on, let Sawi mothers keep their own babies close to their breasts—God has given *His* Son for you! Lay your hands upon Him in faith and His Spirit will dwell in your hearts to keep you in the way of peace!”

I paused to renew my dependence upon the Holy Spirit before exclaiming, “If your *tarop* children, who were weak, could bring you peace, think how much greater will be the peace God’s perfect *Tarop* will bring!”

Then I heard it again. The same soft, nasal expletive I had detected a day earlier at the end of my sessions with Haenam and Kamur. The Sawi call it *yukop*

kekedon yah motaken. It signifies deep concern. I could hear its tiny explosions popping around me.

A man named Sieri expressed in words what his fellows were thinking:

“*Sin bohos!* It’s true; our *tarop* children are not strong! I once knew a man who gave his son as a *tarop* to his enemies, waited a few days and then ventured a friendly visit to the village which had received his child. But as he approached the manhouse, men came storming out of it and threatened him with their spears.

“He exclaimed, ‘Why do you threaten me? I gave you my son!’

“They replied, ‘You gave us your son, but he died last night—what are you doing here?’ Then they killed him!”

This recall touched off a still louder out-popping of *yukop kekedon yah motaken*. Men were rubbing their elbows as they sat on their grass mats, a sign that they were asking themselves, “What should we do?”

The look on their faces told me I had not only discovered a parallel between their culture and the gospel, but I had also scraped a raw nerve as well—the obvious inadequacy of the Sawi peace child! And they winced collectively as I deliberately probed along that raw nerve.

They knew the peace-child concept was their *best*. Now they were finding what I too had found nine years before—*man’s best is not enough!* They were approaching the realization that everyone’s true self is waiting for him in the Son of God. And if you don’t find your true self *there*, you *lose* it! Forever!

I sat down again among them and began to talk about the change of behavior which follows reception of a peace child. I was tracing still another parallel between their culture and the gospel—the shared belief in repentance.

Once again, there was stillness in the manhouse.

Chapter 19 CAPSIZED AMONG CROCODILES

Throughout the months of march, April and May 1963, I continued accenting the peace child of God in the man houses of a number of Sawi villages, gently inviting those who wanted to live by God's standard of peace to receive him. Kani, Mahaen, Hato and others like them listened intently, even wistfully, yet every time they approached the threshold of decision they drew back.

Fear of unfavorable reaction from the demon world was their main restraint. How would the spirits view this radical departure from ancestral tradition which the Tuan was proposing? If the demons reacted unfavorably—and the Sawi believed they most certainly would—could the Tuan and his God protect those who believed and their wives and children from disaster?

The arguments for receiving God's Peace Child were reasonable and compelling, to be sure—almost everyone now understood why the Tuan and his wife had come—but what would the practical outworking be like?

For my part, I was wondering, "What else will it take to draw these men and their families to Jesus? I have presented Him in terms of a redemptive analogy from their own culture. I have used the key God provided, and in so doing have satisfied their intellectual need to understand the gospel. The basis for faith has been explained. Yet still something more is needed to precipitate their commitment to Him!

"What other more compelling persuasion can I offer?"

Little did I realize what deeper forms of persuasion God still had in reserve for the Sawi, or what it would cost us to be the agents of that persuasion.

In May of 1963 the Dutch government ceded control of Netherlands New Guinea to the United Nations, with transfer to Indonesian sovereignty to follow in eight months' time. Not until a few years later would the Sawi and other tribes like them realize the staggering impact this political event would have on their future.

Basically, the policy of the Dutch government had been to establish a few widely scattered outposts, leaving intervening wilderness areas virtually untouched and uncontrolled. It was due to this policy of minimal development that tribes like the Sawi were left undisturbed even as late as the early 1960s. Only an occasional patrol officer, explorer, scientist, prospector or hunter ever probed the vast ungoverned areas, and when they did, they took little and changed little.

Indonesian control, however, would bring dramatic changes. Census takers would soon visit every village they could possibly reach. Police patrols would increasingly enforce civil law. Government-subsidized teachers would establish accredited schools in the Indonesian language. The harvesting of ironwood and other valuable timbers would begin in earnest. In some areas, crocodiles would be hunted almost to extinction for their highly prized skins.

Western oil and copper mining companies would abruptly construct massive bases in the pristine wilderness. Soon the chatter of cicadas and the mewling of birds-of-paradise would be drowned out in some areas by the roar of diesel generators, the clatter of helicopters and the thunder of dynamite hurling rock into the sky.

Even more significantly, opening the floodgates to heavy migration from teeming islands like Java, Sumatra and the Celebes would, within one generation, render the Sawi and their eight hundred thousand fellow New Guineans a minority people in their own land. These were only a few of the mammoth changes lurking over the jungle horizon in 1963—changes which would almost certainly plunge the Sawi and other unprepared tribes into severe cultural disorientation, apathy and even extinction, unless. . . .

Unless we, as the first agents of change to live among them, could effectively precondition them for survival in the modern world. For this, we must give them not only the Christian hope of eternal life, but also an ethic strong enough and resilient enough to sustain them through a one generation riptide transition from the stone age to the twentieth century.

To be understood, that new ethic must somehow be tied in with their former culture. To assure their well-being it must also equip them to discern good and evil in strange new contexts, and then motivate them to choose the good! To endure, that ethic must spring from confidence in the unchanging love and justice of God.

I was convinced right down to the soles of my feet that the Bible I held in my hand was the God-ordained purveyor of that kind of an ethic. As such it was the key to well-being for the Sawi people in both this world and the next. But to become effective, it must win one essential commodity which all our prayer, persuasion and labor had still not brought forth—their response!

And time for the cultural preconditioning of the Sawi was running out. Meanwhile, even as diplomats in New York, The Hague, and Jakarta were signing their embossed documents, headhunting and cannibalism persisted along the Kronkel River. A few months earlier, Asmat from the lower Kronkel had beheaded and devoured seven Sawi teen-agers from Mauro village. Later, in May 1963, the Asmat tried to forestall Sawi retaliation by sending gifts as a peace payment to Mauro. Mauro accepted the gifts and promised peace, but in actual fact they regarded the payment as in no way binding. A few knives, dogtooth necklaces and other trinkets were not the same as a peace child. And they by no means balanced the loss of seven young men.

Thinking they had settled the matter, the Asmat became less wary. On May 20 a number of Asmat men, women and children were gathering shrimp along a mudbank of the Kronkel when suddenly the foliage above them swarmed with armed Sawi. Only one man escaped, paddling desperately downriver with a broken spear shaft protruding from his back. The heads of the others were soon mounted on bow tips and lined along the walls of the Mauro man house, gaping down at their own flesh sizzling in the fireplaces below. Fearing massive Asmat retaliation, Mauro moved deeper into the sago swamps. So also did Seremeet who feared that the Asmat, failing to locate Mauro, would continue further upstream and pounce on Seremeet instead.

Haenam, Kamur and Yohwi likewise considered abandoning our riverside location out of fear of the Asmat, but decided they should stay to protect us! “With our three villages combined, we have enough men to withstand even a very large Asmat force,” said Hato and Kigo.

Hato then added solemnly, “Tuan and Nyonya, we here have given up headhunting and cannibalism for your sake, but all around us. . . .” He swung his bow in an arc toward the horizon.

“I know,” I replied. “I know also that if Carol and I should leave here, you would quickly revert to headhunting and cannibalism against your enemies, because you have not asked the *Tarop* of God to give you new hearts.”

Hato considered this for a moment. “*Sin bohos komai*. I think you’re right!” he replied at length.

In June of the same year, Carol, Stephen and I returned to cool Karubaga in the central highlands to await the birth of our second child. On June 21 he arrived, attended by RBMU’s Dr. Jack Leng. We named our baby Shannon Douglas.

On July 1 we returned to the Sawi with our delightful new baby, and with a guest as well! Winifred Frost, a colleague from Canada, had decided to spend a few days of her vacation with us so that she might witness the primitive beginnings of the work in a new tribe. By this time we had acquired an eighteen-horsepower outboard motor and a twenty-foot-long dugout which Hato, Maum and Kani, under close supervision, had fashioned with two features no Sawi dugout had even known—a keel to improve its stability and a special mount for our outboard.

Late in the afternoon of July 4, we packed a lunch and set out with Winifred and our two babies for a restful boat trip upstream with Kamur, taking with us our Sawi houseboy, Mavo, to act as guide and helper. As we pulled away from the shore, I instructed Mavo to sit well forward in the bow of the three-foot-wide dugout to keep watch for any submerged logs which might lie across our course.

“Mavo, if you see any logs, wave to me,” I said, increasing the speed of the boat to about twelve knots.

Mavo nodded, but as the squeal of the outboard grew louder and the boat leaped forward, I saw his eyes widen in fear. To him, it seemed we were flying at breakneck speed over the smooth, black surface. Twelve knots was about three times faster than Mavo had ever traveled on water. Apprehensively, he gripped the sides of the dugout. After a few minutes he’ll get used to the speed and relax like Hadi and Er did on the *Ebenezer*, I reasoned.

Ten minutes later we were cruising around a jungle-walled bend nearly two miles upstream from Kamur when suddenly Mavo looked back and began signaling frantically for me to swing to one side. There must be a submerged log right in front of us, I thought, and reacted by swinging our craft just a little too sharply to the left. The dugout began to capsize. The keel I had been counting on for extra stability seemed to be no help at all.

I tried to regain our balance by swinging back to the right, but it was too late. Through one eternal second of horror I could see Carol clutching thirteen-day-old Shannon in her arms as she disappeared under the surface . . . Stephen falling into the black depths . . . Winifred and Mavo vainly leaning against the side of the dugout as it loomed up and over us all.

Then I hit the surface myself, still gripping the steering handle of the outboard. Dimly I could hear the muted roar of the engine throbbing under the surface; the whistle of the propeller spinning dangerously close to my shoulder. Then the motor died and we were drifting in silence in the very center of the crocodile-haunted Kronkel.

Winifred and Mavo surfaced almost at once and reached for the upturned keel of the dugout. Mavo, fearing crocodiles, pulled himself immediately on top of the dugout and sat benumbed on the keel. Carol, Stephen and Shannon were nowhere in sight.

“God help me!” I cried in a prayer of desperation—I’ve got to find them before the current separates us! And then a second thought exploded like a bullet through my brain—and before a crocodile finds them!

I knew there was little use searching visually under the water. It was impossible to see more than a couple of feet through the tea-dark discoloration of the Kronkel’s algae. Instead I swam to the place where Carol had disappeared and groped in all directions under the surface, reaching with both arms and legs to try and make contact with her.

Suddenly Shannon’s tiny face broke the surface right in front of me. Carol must have pushed him up so I could see him, I thought, as I quickly caught hold of Shannon and pushed him and his swath of dripping blankets up into Mavo’s arms. Shannon broke forth immediately in a loud, startled cry. “Good!” I said to myself. “That means he hasn’t breathed any water into his lungs.”

Even as I whirled around to resume my search for Carol and Stephen, Carol surfaced. I caught her by the wrist and drew her close to the dugout, instructing her to hang on to the keel.

Now Stephen. Quickly I scanned the surface for some sign of at least a tiny hand reaching up. I saw only reflections gleaming from the waves we had created. And under the surface—only blackness.

Somewhere in that blackness my nineteen-month-old son was struggling, perhaps already sinking toward the bottomless ooze of the Kronkel’s bed twenty feet below. Fighting back waves of despair, I reached out again with my arms and legs, trying to spread myself through as large a volume of water as possible. I could feel nothing.

“Perhaps he’s trapped under the dugout! Father in heaven, keep the crocodiles away!”

Suddenly the thought flashed through my mind that Mavo from his vantage point on top of the dugout might be able to see down through the reflections better than I could, that is, if Stephen were still within two feet of the surface. “Mavo, can you see Stephen?” I called in mounting anxiety.

My question seemed to jerk him out of his stupor. He scanned the water carefully. He pointed.

With a surge of hope I swam in that direction and then I saw what Mavo had seen—a tiny blur of blondness, faintly visible through the Kronkel's murky water. A second later Stephen was in my arms. Surely by now he will have breathed in water, I thought. I was wrong. God in His mercy had given him sense not to try to breathe under water. As soon as I yanked him to the surface, he took a deep breath and began to cry. A moment later, Mavo had a baby under his other arm as well.

Now to get everyone ashore. Should we abandon the dugout and swim for it with the two babies? I noticed our plastic lunch bucket floating nearby—we could use that to bail the dugout, but it would take ten minutes at least! Surely the crocodiles wouldn't wait that long, nor would the fourteenfoot pythons which abound in the Kronkel.

The trouble was, if a crocodile intercepted one of us swimming to shore, we would have nothing to hold on to that would keep us from being pulled under. Of course, if the crocodile was a large one even holding on to the dugout would be impossible.

If only someone were near with a canoe. Little chance, I thought—with only an hour of daylight left, no one will be lingering this far from the village.

"God help us!" I cried again from my heart. Then we heard it. Frantic paddling, as two-hundred yards away a black Sawi dugout darted out of the mouth of a small tributary. Gradually our unbelieving eyes registered two figures in the canoe—Mavo's own father, Taeri, and his younger sister, Aray.

"Taeri, hurry!" Mavo shouted above the cries of our babies. Old Taeri was nearly breaking his paddle as it was!

A minute later they were there beside us, braking their canoe to a halt with long, ironwood paddles and helping Carol up into their slim craft. As soon as Carol was seated in Taeri's canoe, Mavo handed her Stephen and Shannon.

Seeing how small Taeri's dugout was, Winifred decided to swim for shore rather than risk a second capsizing. Taeri paddled along beside her, ready to use the sharp upper tip of his paddle as a weapon against any crocodile which might choose that moment to attack.

Even as they headed for shore, Mavo and I turned our dugout upright and began to bail it out, using both our cupped hands and the plastic lunch bucket. I noticed that Mavo kept looking at me fearfully.

Paddling against the current, we reached home just before dark, shivering from the chill dampness of our clothes and from the thought of the utter tragedy which had nearly overtaken us. Sawi villagers lined the shore, anxious to inquire about what had happened. We touched land, and I began telling them about the accident. As I did so, I tried hard to make it clear that the whole thing was all my fault.

But not one would listen to me. Instead, the men on the shore turned angrily on poor Mavo, insulting and threatening him for being so careless with the Tuan and his family. Then I understood why Mavo had been so fearful following the accident. Since the overturning of a canoe usually meant the loss of valuable axes, machetes or knives, if not a human life as well, it was regarded as a serious "crime" among the Sawi and was usually followed by bitter recriminations and even the shedding of blood.

Mavo was in trouble and he knew it. Woebegone and afraid, he cowered in front of Hato and others as their indignation began to swell against him. Suddenly Hato turned toward me with a length of heavy vine in his hand. "Tuan!" he said angrily, "Just say the word and I'll thrash him for you with this length of vine!"

I could see he fully expected my immediate compliance. But while Carol and Winifred took the children to our house, I walked past Hato and slid my arm around Mavo's trembling shoulders. Looking the old chief in the eye, I said evenly before them all, "None of you will raise a hand against my friend, Mavo.

Without his help, I could easily have lost one of my children in the river. As long as I live, Mavo will be like a beloved son to me!"

The expression on Hato's craggy countenance underwent deep change. The other Sawi were listening in astonished silence as I continued, "Instead of blaming Mavo, join me in thanking *Myao Kodon* for saving us from tragedy!" First Hato lowered his whipping vine; then he bowed his head. The others followed his example, listening as I poured out my gratitude to God in their tongue. When I opened my eyes, Mavo was looking up into my face, his own eyes brimming with tears. Together we lifted the flooded outboard from the dugout and carried it to the house. It would take some work to get it going again.

The following Lord's Day I spoke to a large gathering of Sawi and Atohwaem on "Christ our Sinbearer." After the meeting, a tall young Atohwaem named Yodai approached me. Bilingual in the Sawi language, Yodai had been listening intently to the gospel for several months.

Often he had stood on our front porch for long hours, quietly observing as we ate our meals, worked, prayed, conversed with each other, and played with our children. He had occasionally helped us by entertaining Stephen or taking him for walks. He had been deeply moved by the near tragedy we had encountered on the river.

Facing me he said in his quiet, unaffected manner, "I am ready to trust in Jesus who came from God."

I took him aside and taught him to pray. I was glad when he started to pray in Sawi, because I wanted to listen in. After just a few sentences, however, he stopped and asked my permission to continue in his own mother tongue, so he could express his feelings more freely to God. "Of course, Yodai," I responded.

Immediately a cool-sounding stream of Atohwaem flowed from him. It was completely unintelligible to me, but the glow in Yodai's eyes when he finished told me God had understood and accepted whatever he said. Reveling together in the presence of God, we headed home.

From a distance, Mavo stood watching, turning a stick over and over in his hands. The joy on Yodai's face aroused a strange, new envy within him. Somehow, innately, he knew that joy was waiting for him also. He had even been dreaming about it. Now he wanted in, no matter what the consequences might be.

That same evening, after he had dried and put away the last dish from our evening meal, Mavo stood silently waiting until I noticed the longing in his eyes. A few minutes later, he too headed home with that joy throbbing through his being. A tiny crack had opened in the base of the first pillar. The ascendancy of the second pillar had begun.

Chapter 20 MY LIVER TREMBLES

Yodai and Mavo, however, were both very young men, and by no means leaders of their respective tribes. If the culture as a whole were to be transformed, the response of the patriarchs was essential. It happened in the Kamur man house a few weeks later.

I had just finished extolling once more the Peace Child of God and was gently inviting any who wanted God's standard of peace to receive Him when. . . .
"Tuan Don!"

I turned. Hato had risen and stood facing me squarely, his feet braced firmly on the sago-frond floor. His muscular arms were folded high in the manner of a headman. His chest heaved with emotion and tiny muscles flexed along his jaw. His single eye gleamed like a hot coal through the smoke and shadow of the man house.

From early childhood relatives and friends had instilled in him the Sawi fear of thinking, saying, attempting, eating or drinking anything that had not been sanctioned by the ancestors. To do so was to win the epithet *baidam*, “foolhardy.” Some had called him *baidam* when, along with Kigo and Numu, he had chosen to stand and face the Dutch riverboats three years earlier.

But the decision he was about to announce now in the manhouse seemed to him far more daring. If they called him *baidam* when he chanced a merely *physical* encounter with the unknown, how much more so now.

Hato’s voice was low and resolute. “Your words make my liver tremble (You have aroused longing within me).”

His voice choked with mingled dread and purpose as he continued, “*Myao Kodon fidasir Tarop Tim fasi fofadivi!*”

I had wondered how a Sawi headman would say it, and what it would feel like to hear it. Now I knew, for Hato had said, “I want to receive the Peace Child of God.” And the sound of his words was saying *ga! ga!* to my ears!

I moved closer to him and laid my hand on his shoulder. His arms had fallen to his sides, and he seemed strangely oblivious to me and to the staring, wondering men seated around him. His one eye gazed past me, shining with a startling new radiance. There was no mistaking it. It was spiritual joy.

“Has He come in?” I whispered.

“*Ota, es!* He has come in!” he responded and then added, “*Yesus av!* It is Jesus!”

I turned from Hato and saw the eyes of every Sawi in the man house fixed upon him. I sensed there was no need to explain what had happened. They too could feel the benign Presence that had visited their headman. Some of them began to rub their elbows. Others were squirming uncomfortably.

From now on things would either get better or worse. But nothing could stay the same.

To the Hebrews He was the *Lamb of God*, to the Greeks, the *Logos*. But to the Sawi He was the *Tarop Tim Kodon*, the Perfect Peace Child—the ideal fulfillment of their own redemptive analogy! Ticking away like a time bomb through the ages, that redemptive analogy was now being detonated by the proclamation of the gospel. From now on, any Sawi who rejected Christ would see himself not as denying an alien concept, but rather as rejecting the Fulfiller of the best in his own culture!

I hurried home and found Carol radiant. I told her about Hato and she replied, “Hato’s daughter, Kimi, prayed with me this morning. She said her father told her he wanted God’s Peace Child, and she decided she did too!”

I gathered Carol into my arms and we thanked God together until we were interrupted by a little tug at knee level, and a soft voice calling in Sawi, “*Navo! Daddy!*” Stephen wanted in on our joy, so I lifted him up and held him between us. The glow of health had long since returned to his cheeks.

“Honey,” I whispered into Carol’s golden hair, “this place has . . . it has . . .” How could I express it? “It has the feel of the center of the will of God!”

“I know,” she responded. “I feel it too!”

Within two weeks almost every member of Hato’s household had shared in the patriarch’s decision. Carol and I began teaching them almost daily whenever they were in the village.

One day I asked Hato, “What made you decide in favor of the *Tarop* of God?” He replied, “When I saw that God’s *Tarop* could give you peace even when your two sons had almost drowned, I knew everything you said about Him must be true. I decided He could take care of us too.”

Hato’s, Yodai’s and Mavo’s peers in all the surrounding villages were now watching them carefully, waiting in suspense to see if the reaction of the spirits might prove to be more than the three spiritual adventurers had counted on. For these other Sawi still higher levels of persuasion would be needed, and I trembled to think what it might take to provide that higher level of persuasion.

My trembling was justified.

Chapter 21 THE LIVING DEAD

“Warahai is dead!”

The cry echoed like a thunder crack among the longhouses of Haenam that terrible day in January 1964. Startled men, women and children hurried out onto their porches just as the bearer of the tragic news beached his dugout in the shallows before the village. Pointing with his long paddle, he directed their still unbelieving eyes toward the *kidari*.

Three crowded dugouts were bearing rapidly closer. An ominous, quavering sound preceded them. It was the Sawi death wail. Sobbing broke out among the watchers in the village. As the three dugouts drew closer, some of the waiting men and women rushed down from their homes and threw themselves into the water, wailing frenetically.

We watched from our home as the three canoes arrived and Warahai’s limp form was borne up into a longhouse on the shoulders of his friends. “Too bad they took him away to the jungle just as our treatments were beginning to do him some good!” I said to Carol as I headed toward the longhouse where Warahai lay.

If I had stayed home that day, it would have been so much easier. I could have shared in their sorrow from a distance and never known the truth. But something drew me up a trembling stair pole into that fateful longhouse and called me through a low doorway to stand among the writhing, naked forms of the male mourners. It kept me waiting where the air was so thick with the horror of death it could hardly be breathed, where every face was twisted with anguish for a human soul and wailing thundered in my ears like a sustained explosion.

I looked down through the interplay of shadowy arms and legs and saw the naked corpse stretched on a grass mat. The dead man’s mother, ancient Augum, crouched over the body of her son, covering his loins with her wizened face and hands. Her actions were based on Sawi belief that a soul sometimes lingers in the generative organs even after other parts of the body are dead. Other close relatives lay across the wasted legs and chest of the dead man, shouting his name, pinching his flesh or burning him with hot embers in a vain attempt to bring forth some movement reminiscent of life.

OF LIFE? I looked again. Yes, the dead man was breathing! Dread chilled my spine. The mourners must be faking it by pressing and releasing his rib cage, I thought. I struggled closer for an unimpeded view, but the sorrowers were now handling the body so violently I could no longer be sure of the apparent motion of breathing.

Slowly I reached for Warahai’s wrist. With eerie suspense I pressed my finger where his pulse would have been. Immediately I felt a weak palpitation. Dread gave way to excitement as I struggled to my feet. “I’ve got good news for you people!” I said, as I began waving my arms to catch their attention. “You think your friend is dead. Probably his breathing grew so weak you thought it had stopped; then in the anguish of mourning you failed to notice it has grown stronger again.”

It took me several minutes to stem the cataract of wailing enough to be heard. I could hardly wait for the moment when my announcement would sweep despair from their faces and replace it with hope for the recovery of Warahai. Finally Mavu took up my plea and bellowed, “Be quiet! Tuan wants to say something!” Only a low sobbing and moaning of the closest relatives remained. At last I could tell them!

“Warahai is not dead!” I proclaimed. “His pulse is still beating! If you look carefully, you will see he is still breathing!”

I thought they would rush forward to check Warahai’s pulse and see for themselves that he was still breathing. No one rushed forward. No one even cast a glance at the now obvious rise and fall of Warahai’s chest. They only

stared at me with dull stares, as if impatient over this interruption to their weeping.

“Don’t they understand?” I asked myself as I repeated the news and added, “You can stop wailing. Carol and I will give Warahai the best drugs we have. Perhaps he will recover.”

Even as I was saying the words, the sick man’s own wife, Anai, looked at Mavu in astonishment and asked, “Don’t the Tuans know about death?”

Mavu’s reply to Anai shocked me. “Naturally, since Tuans themselves never die, we can’t expect a Tuan to understand death. Well just have to be patient with him!”

So the Sawi thought we were immortal!

“You’re wrong, Mavu,” I protested. “We Tuans are subject to death just like you are. My father died when I was a boy. I understand about death.”

Mavu and the others showed surprise. I had just exploded a myth. Then he rejoined, “Very well, you understand death as Tuans know it. But,” Mavu looked sorrowfully at Warahai’s faintly gasping, comatose figure, “obviously you don’t understand Sawi death!”

“Why do you say that, Mavu?”

“Because you think Warahai is still alive!”

“You yourself can see he is still breathing!”

Mavu smiled at me condescendingly. Then he continued, as if reciting a lesson to a child, “Warahai is still breathing because he is in a condition of ‘apparent life’ called *aumamay*. Sometimes in death a person’s body keeps functioning for a while after his soul has departed. But it doesn’t last long.”

“How can you distinguish *aumamay* from temporary unconsciousness?” I countered.

Mavu smiled again. “The spirits tell us.”

“How do they tell you?” I pressed.

Some of the mourners surrounding us were growing impatient. The matter under discussion was to them so elementary as to hardly bear repeating, and could not delay their weeping much longer. Renewed wailing began to well up around me.

“They tell us through a sorceress,” Mavu explained matter-of-factly.

“And who is the sorceress who says Warahai is in *aumamay*?” I asked through the rising crescendo.

Mavu pointed with his chin toward the Haenam sorceress named Aham. I turned and looked at Aham. She glared back at me, as if sensing a challenge.

“Aham had a vision this morning. She actually saw Warahai’s soul leave his body in *aumamay*.”

“She says she did,” I countered, thinking fast. Mavu did not seem to understand the point of my remark. Aham was the most renowned sorceress in our community of three villages. It did not occur to the Sawi to doubt her word.

The mourners were beginning to handle Warahai violently again, burning him with hot embers and shouting in his ears. Under this kind of treatment, in his weakened condition, he would be dead before sundown. Sawi belief in *aumamay* would be still further confirmed! And Aham the sorceress would have precipitated the death of a patient we might have been able to save.

Before God I came to a decision. I raised my arms and shouted again for silence. Aham was watching me uneasily. When the din had subsided, I threw down the gauntlet.

“Aham has told you, in the name of the demons, that Warahai is already dead. In the name of Jesus, I tell you he is still alive! His soul is still in his body! Now I plead with you—stop wailing over him! Stop burning him with coals! Give us time to pray over him and treat him. If he recovers. . . .”

My heart was pounding violently. Warahai didn’t look like a patient who might recover. His unconsciousness looked indeed like a terminal coma not unlike the Sawi concept of *aumamay*. I was laying everything on the line and the apparent odds were all in Aham’s favor.

“If Warahai recovers, if he actually opens his eyes and talks to you and takes food—then you will know I have told you the truth in Jesus’ name. But if . . .” (I was going to say “if he dies,” and then I realized that wouldn’t make sense to them because they considered him already dead.)

“. . . if his pulse stops beating, you can believe Aham if you want to!”

Mavu laughed outright. “Warahai can’t possibly recover!”

Someone else called, “Save your medicine for the living!”

Then hoary-haired old Boro rose to his feet. He was Warahai's eldest brother. He issued a gruff order to some of the younger men sitting nearby, "Go and build a gravehouse!"

The young men took their machetes and left in obedience to Boro. Then horror choked my throat as Boro looked at me and said, "We bury Warahai today!"

Chapter 22 THE POWER OF AUMAMAY

Burial among the Sawi means wrapping a corpse tightly in a grass mat, binding it firmly with vines around the neck, waist and ankles and then interring it in a small, coffin-sized grave house elevated five to fifteen feet above the ground. And since the Sawi were fully convinced that persons officially declared to be in *aumamay* were already dead, they had no compunction about interring them in grave houses either.

I shuddered as I thought of the numberless unconscious men, women and children who, in past ages, had been interred in such grave houses and deserted. Later perhaps, they regained consciousness, realized their plight and cried out in vain for help through the constricting, muffling mats bound tightly around their faces. Any passerby hearing their moans would not even stop to investigate—he would think it was only a case of *aumamay* lasting longer than usual.

Since the floor of a grave house was slanted to keep the body from sliding out, a weakened person, bound in the mats, would not even stand a good chance of wriggling out and falling to the ground to attract attention. Hence he could only sink back into a delirium of terror and die of hunger and thirst, if not from his original plight.

"Poor Warahai," I mused, looking down at his emaciated form. "You have fallen among thieves: the soul-stealing beliefs of your own people. And I don't feel

free, like the priest or the Levite, to pass by you on the other side, just because your culture is different from mine. I am your keeper, Warahai!"

"Sorry, Boro," I said aloud. "It is *apsar* 'taboo' for me to let a man be buried while still breathing. You won't make me guilty of taboo by insisting, will you?" Boro blinked and thought for a few moments. Then he turned and called the young grave house builders to return.

I looked around at the others and said, "Just to make sure you don't burn Warahai with hot embers and shout in his ears, I'm going to stay here the rest of the afternoon."

I went to the longhouse door and called Carol. Minutes later she arrived with medicine and gave Warahai an injection. Boro, Mavu, Augum and Aham looked at one another in perplexity, and then apparently decided simply to wait it out rather than venture a head-on clash of wills. They were sure Warahai would stop breathing before dark.

Four days and three nights later we were still struggling to save Warahai's life and still resisting the tide of public opinion which wanted to bury him as a dead man. Warahai had shown some signs of improvement, but not enough to shake Sawi belief in *aumamay* or in the infallibility of Aham's purported vision.

"Your medicine is making his *aumamay* last longer than usual, but it cannot bring back his soul!" was their conclusion. And now, just as darkness ended the fourth day, every sign of improvement in Warahai vanished and his condition deteriorated rapidly.

Our faith for the crisis was nearly exhausted. Our eyes were red from three nearly sleepless nights protecting the sick man from the mourners and trying to pray back the steady encroachment of death. Hato and other Sawi Christians were apprehensive lest I stretch the patience of Warahai's relatives too far. Confused and weary, Carol and I sat down for our evening meal when suddenly a tumult of wailing erupted from the longhouse where Warahai lay. The same unspoken thought flashed between us—Warahai's pulse must have stopped!

Taking a kerosene lamp, I rushed through the night to the longhouse. It was packed with screaming, stamping, wailing people. Pressing through to the center of the crowd, I found them once again mauling and burning Warahai's limp body. Perhaps it no longer matters, I thought as I reached for Warahai's wrist.

"Lord God, have You abandoned us to defeat in this crisis?" I cried in silent anguish.

I gripped Warahai's wrist and searched for his pulse and hurled another mute petition heavenward.

"Are You going to throw away this opportunity to destroy a belief which over centuries has consigned thousands of helpless sufferers to premature death?"

I still couldn't find a pulse.

"If Warahai dies, belief in *aumamay* will be more deeply entrenched than ever, because Your servants challenged it and failed."

The whole longhouse was swaying. It was hard to keep my balance in the dim flickering shadows.

"You could heal him so easily! Don't You want the honor we are trying to win for You in the minds of these people?"

Despairing, I squeezed Warahai's wrist one last time.

"Why have I failed to find favor with You?"

His flesh pulsed against my fingertip weakly, but steadily. The battle was still on.

"Why have you suddenly started mourning like this again?" I asked.

Someone shouted at me, wild-eyed, "Aham had another vision! This time she saw a spirit ambush Warahai's soul and eat it! Now we know there is no chance you can make Warahai's soul return to his body! The spirits want us to bury him first thing in the morning!"

Through the shadows I saw Aham watching me, a look of triumph on her swarthy face. She had grown weary of having her infallibility questioned. She had found a way to precipitate a final conclusion at once. Resentful murmuring began to swell in the shadows around me. Warahai's aged mother pranced

back and forth, scoffing at our intention to try to recover her son. Behind me and on all sides people began to say, "Go! Leave Warahai to us!"

Suddenly a sincere, understanding voice came out of the shadows. It was the voice of Narai, my language informant and one of the Christians. He said, "Tuan, you don't understand Sawi death. You'd better leave."

Other voices within my own being were already agreeing with him. The voices said, "You've done all that could be expected of you. If God wanted to give you victory in this, He'd have done it before now. Let the relatives take responsibility for their own actions."

"Warahai's eyes are already glazed. The death rattle is already in his throat. He'll die within twenty-four hours anyway. It's not worth creating a riot. It's only your pride that doesn't want to accept defeat. Give up!"

But then I tried to imagine myself consenting the next morning when they wrapped the woven grass shrouds around Warahai's still breathing face and pulled the vines tight. I tried to picture myself working up courage to contest their belief in *aumamay* on some later occasion, after having failed in this one. No, that cannot be.

I tried to summon courage, the same courage God had given me for past crises, but it was gone, already disintegrating inside a cocoon of despair. I pressed my spirit naked against God, that He might conceive new courage within me. He conceived it and it grew, actually feeding on the despair that killed its predecessor. In a few moments it was ready to be born in action.

"Lord, what shall I do?"

"Get Warahai out of here!"

"But Lord, for that I'll need help. Who among these people will help me? I'm alone."

"Look around you!"

I started to look around and immediately Mahaen's lean, somber face stood out in the light of my lamp.

“Mahaen, come here.”

He came as if he had no choice.

I spoke softly in his ear. “When I lift Warahai onto your back, carry him out of here and over to my storehouse. I’ll clear the way ahead of you.”

Mahaen searched my face. How could he possibly comply? Over the past months he had grown increasingly friendly toward me, though on this occasion he was barely convinced of the wisdom of my decisions.

“Warahai is still alive! Help me prove it!” I urged.

Mahaen’s features firmed with decision. “*Fisahaemakon!* I’ll carry him!” he said.

I set down the lamp and lifted the unconscious invalid up onto Mahaen’s back. He staggered to his feet under Warahai’s weight. Anger flared around us as we headed for the doorway.

Warahai’s younger brother Kimi stood ready to oppose us with his weapons. Mahaen hesitated.

“Keep going!” I urged.

“Tuan, Warahai’s dead!” Mahaen cried, weakening under the pressure of the crowd.

“He’s not dead! Keep going!”

Suddenly another youth named Aidon stepped out of the mass of protesting people. “I’ll help you carry him!” Aidon said firmly, lifting Warahai’s legs onto his shoulders.

Encouraged, Mahaen moved out through the doorway and down the notched stair pole, followed by Aidon.

I was keeping an eye on Kimi and the others. They had not prepared themselves for such an unexpected stratagem. Taken by surprise, they followed us through the darkness, shouting, “Bring Warahai back! Bring him back!”

We kept going until we were inside the storehouse. I closed the door against the crowd. Augum, Warahai’s mother, leaped back and forth outside our door,

crying bitterly, while Kimi shouted, “Tuan, let me carry him back to the longhouse!”

As firmly as possible I answered, “No!”

Soon the crowd dispersed to their homes. For two hours their cries of anger grew louder until I wondered if they were working themselves up to storm the little building. They could have done it easily.

Toward midnight, the village grew quiet. Aidon returned home, while Mahaen remained to watch with me over Warahai’s motionless form. About midnight, Carol joined me in the storehouse. Mahaen sat listening quietly as we prayed again for Warahai’s recovery, and sang a hymn of praise to God.

As dawn broke, I awoke to hear an ominous rattling in Warahai’s chest. Pneumonia was causing his lungs to fill with fluid. To prevent suffocation, I used my battery hydrometer to suction as much of the fluid as possible from his throat.

Later in the day Carol pointed to our remaining box of penicillin ampules and said, “This one man is rapidly depleting our supply, and it isn’t doing him any good. Should I continue?”

“No,” I replied. “If our drugs could help him, surely we would have seen an improvement by now. Other patients will need those drugs. From now on it’s prayer and prayer alone.”

We looked down at Warahai. His breathing was growing steadily fainter. His skin hung like loose parchment over his almost fleshless skeleton. His half-open, unblinking eyes seemed already to be gazing into the next world.

Carol reminisced, “In the hospital where I trained as a nurse, patients like Warahai were kept under constant intravenous feeding, and we had electrical equipment to extract fluid from their lungs. Even so, some of them died, and they were not as far gone as Warahai.

“I’m sure there isn’t a doctor in the world who would say there was any hope for him apart from . . .”

“. . . a miracle?” I responded. “That’s all we can hope for now.” Later that day Mavo appeared suddenly in the doorway of our home.

“Tuan,” he whispered, “Kimi and others of Warahai’s relatives are coming. Kimi is hiding a bone dagger behind his back. Be careful.”

I thanked Mavo and looked out through our screen window at the approaching party. Their eyes were full of hurt and blame. They seemed to say, “Why are you making us drag this thing on day after day? But for you, Warahai would have been buried long ago. You are simply making it more painful for all of us.” “Kimi!” I called suddenly, “You are hiding a bone dagger behind your back—remove it from my yard at once!” Startled, Kimi handed the weapon to a boy standing near him who promptly carried the weapon back to the village.

At sunset, Kimi, Boro and other relatives of Warahai returned in a much more conciliatory mood. “Tuan, we still believe Warahai is dead and should be buried, but we have decided to respect your wishes. Let us take him back to the longhouse, and we give you our word that we will not mourn over him, burn him with embers or try to bury him as long as his pulse is beating. When his pulse stops, we will call you so you can see for yourself that it has stopped. Only then will we bury him.”

My heart warmed toward them. At least this small measure of victory had been won, though I still hoped for much more. I gave them permission to carry Warahai back to the longhouse. His coma was deeper than ever.

As darkness fell, Warahai’s relatives were true to their word. No sound of wailing or commotion could be heard from Haenam village. Five days of struggle, and how would it end? How much longer could Warahai continue breathing while God waited?

In agony of spirit, I reached for our book of topical Scripture readings, turned to the evening reading for January 30, and began to read aloud, “O Thou that hearest prayer. . . . The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open unto their cry. . . . When he cries unto Me, I will hear, for I am gracious. . . . He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him. . . . O Lord, Thou art our God;

let not man prevail against Thee. . . . If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.”

The two of us sat and looked at each other in the soft lamplight. If it had been only one isolated promise in the middle of a passage, it would have been sweet enough. Instead unexpectedly, promises heaped upon promises had leaped forth from one page, each vying with the others to see which could encourage us the most.

We smiled at each other, misty-eyed and weary, yet suddenly overflowing with joy. An audible voice could not have made the message clearer. God had heard our prayer.

In the morning Haenam was strangely quiet. I walked slowly toward the village. Yamasi, one of Warahai’s brothers, stood waiting beside the trail. He pretended not to notice the question in my eyes as he whittled on a stick. So I voiced it, “How is he?”

Yamasi glanced sheepishly toward me and said, “He’s been talking to us.”

“He’s been talking?”

“Yes.”

My heart was turning cartwheels inside me. “What did he say?”

“He said to his mother, ‘O Mother, don’t be sad!’ ”

Like a man in a dream, I walked past Yamasi and climbed up into the longhouse. Warahai opened his eyes and looked at me as I bent over him.

His breathing was free and normal.

“*Konahari*, Warahai!” I said to him.

“*Konahari!*” he replied, smiling.

He was leaning back across his mother’s lap. His wife and children and other relatives were gathered close around him. I lifted his wrist in my hand. The chill of near-death was gone. His pulse was stronger.

The normally noisy longhouse was still as a cathedral. I looked around from face to face. One by one, Warahai’s relatives dropped their gazes toward the floor.

“Do dead men say *konahari*?” I asked quietly.

After an embarrassed silence, someone said, “No. Dead men never say *konahari*.”

“And if Warahai’s soul had been cut up and eaten by a demon, would he be looking around at us as you now observe?” I continued.

“We listened to a lie,” said Mahaen solemnly.

I looked around for Aham, but she was nowhere in sight.

“We nearly buried a living man,” said Boro, staring at the wall.

“How good is the kindness of Jesus!” said old Augum, stroking Warahai’s forehead.

I hurried home to tell Carol and we returned together with nourishment for Warahai. He had been several days without food. After he had eaten, we praised God openly for Warahai’s recovery and then hurried to Kamur to share our joy with the Christians there.

On the following day, four of Haenam’s leading men received Christ. One of the four was Aham’s husband. Another was Mahaen. Still another was Kani, Haenam’s “master of treachery.”

Later, in the Seremeet man house, Morkay rose to his feet. There was a new light on his usually soulful countenance as he said, “*Myao Kodon* has shown us His hand is strong! As for me, I believe!”

Sieri and his son Badan followed Morkay’s example, as half of Seremeet village would follow before two more years had passed.

When I returned from Seremeet I visited Warahai again in his longhouse and found him sitting unaided by his fireplace. He greeted me cheerfully. I sat down and talked with him and then prayed with him before leaving the longhouse. As far as I could tell, he too had come to a genuine trust in Christ.

I was disappointed to find that Warahai’s clan was making no effort to obtain fresh food for him from the jungle, and he was finding the stale sago they offered him very unappetizing. I urged them to make better provision for him,

but with little effect. As an example, Carol and I sent occasional gifts of fresh food to Warahai.

Within a few days Boro, Aham, Kimi, Yamasi and others of Warahai’s relatives made it clear that they had decided to reject Christ in spite of God’s mercy in the healing of Warahai.

“You are indeed free to reject God’s Son if that is your choice. But remember this,” I counseled, “You now possess insight none of your ancestors ever possessed, and God will judge you according to that insight. The same God who shows kindness can also punish.”

Boro replied, “Let those believe who want to believe. We’ll stay as we are.”

Without another word, I turned and left him. Outside Boro’s longhouse a group of Haenam believers stood waiting. We walked together toward a small meetinghouse that now stood on a nearby knoll of high ground.

Others who had recently trusted came down out of their longhouses and joined our jubilant conversation as we proceeded. There was my friend Mahaen and lovely Waiv, old Wario’s daughter, soon to be given in marriage to Mahaen.

With them came young Amus and his bride-to-be, Aiyau, accompanied by thoughtful Kani, who had carried so many dark memories so long. Yodai, Hadi and a handful of other Atohwæm believers from Yohwi followed them, along with a band of laughing children who still didn’t understand what it was all about, yet were drawn spontaneously to share in our joy.

Inside the meeting house, the Kamur believers were waiting: Hato, his wives, his sons and his daughters; Kaiyo, who had given the peace child and opened my eyes. Mavo, the quiet helper, and winsome Isai, the boy who had climbed a tree to watch the two riverboats surge past his village, were also there.

Beside them were Isai’s father, Mairah, whom Isai had brought to Jesus, and Seg, who had secretly observed me standing in the leafy arena when I chose the site for my home. Amhwi the sincere, who had learned to trust by watching Mavo, completed the group.

Carol handed me a cardboard box. A hush fell as I began to open it.

“We have a surprise for you.”

I lifted a handful of newly stenciled white booklets out of the box. Then, assuming an air of deepest confidentiality, I whispered audibly, “We’re going to teach all of you to read!”

Eager hands of young and old alike reached up as I handed out copies of the first Sawi primer. The initial lesson was how to hold the primers right side up. The second lesson was how to open one page at a time. Hato grinned avidly. He was learning fast. It was a pleasant interlude before our next shock.

Chapter 23 EYES RED WITH WATCHING

The flimsy poles of the grave house trembled under the frenzied assault of the mourners. Some leaned against its sides, moaning in abject grief, their arms upstretched toward the corpse above them, their fingers writhing as if trying to grip some intangible substance of the departed soul. Others mounted the platform itself and hovered vulturelike above the dead body, shrieking like banshees.

The mourners’ bodies were caked in mud. The air was thick with the stench of the corpse, but they willingly endured it. Death-flies swarmed around their faces, but they paid no attention.

Through nine hot days and nine humid nights they had waited while that stench grew stronger and the fly swarms thicker. On mats in the long jungle longhouse nearby, they had sat waiting, breathing it in. To do so was only the first stage of a Sawi veneration procedure called *gefam ason*. Now the relatives were keyed to carry out the remaining progressions of *gefam ason*, ready to consummate their grief in the time-honored manner.

Suddenly a young relative worked his way between two of the supporting poles under the gravehouse. He danced feverishly, calling aloud the name of the departed one. And as he danced, maggots and rotting flesh, shaken loose from

the trembling platform above him, rained down upon his shoulders, his forehead, his hair. The second level of despair had been enacted.

The pitch of wailing rose higher in sympathy with the young man’s extreme devotion. Presently the young man stepped out from under the gravehouse and staggered toward the still pools of a nearby stream. Now that his ordeal was over, and he dared to relax his will, he began to heave convulsively as waves of nausea overcame him. Moaning and retching with mingled sorrow and revulsion, he let himself sink down into the cleansing water. All eyes now turned to the men who surrounded the corpse on top of the burial platform. It was up to one of them, if the next level were to be attained. Perhaps they would fail.

Staring intently at the seething horror between them, the men in question knelt in a tight circle. Their hands trembled. Their bodies went rigid.

Suddenly one man raised his arm high above the corpse and with a shrill apocalyptic screech drove his clenched fist deep into the putrid body cavity. For a few brief seconds the man’s face registered a shock of unutterable ghastliness, gouging an eternal memory in the minds of all who beheld him. Then, swooning from severe emotional exhaustion, he sagged slowly over the side of the platform, dragging his dripping hand after him. The third level had been achieved.

The other mourners caught him and carried him up into the longhouse and set him down on a grass mat, where he waited until freshly cooked sago was brought to him. Taking the sago in his contaminated right hand, he raised it to his lips and ate it, while the other mourners walled around him with unbelievable intensity. The fourth and ultimate level of despair had been expressed.

The pinnacle of highest emotion had passed. Most of the mourners drifted slowly up into the longhouse, as golden evening burned across the eden of towering sago palms that surrounded their clearing.

A handful remained to weep around the grave house: Boro, Augum, Yamasi and Kimi. As they wept they called aloud the name of the freshly wounded corpse above them: Warahai.

Red shafts of sunset pierced the shadows around me. Why did God let him die? For ten days he had gained strength, venturing out of his home, even sitting up late at night to talk with his friends. Then without warning on the eleventh day, Warahai lapsed into unconsciousness. And on the thirteenth day, he died.

Was it only lack of fresh food that killed him? How I wished we had sent him more of our limited supply of fruit and eggs! Or were the Sawi Christians right in concluding that God had chosen to fulfill my warning to Boro, thus confronting unbelievers with a still higher level of persuasion? For nine days I had been asking questions such as these. I had hoped Warahai would remain as a living evidence of God's mercy and power. But God had claimed the evidence for Himself.

Still, I had my consolations. Sawi belief in *aumamay* had been shattered wherever the news of Warahai's recovery spread. The faith of the believers had increased, and many new believers had joined our company.

I drew a deep breath and headed for home just as a lone figure beached his dugout in front of our house. He greeted me as I reached our front steps.

"*Konahari!*" I replied. "Where have you come from?"

"From Boro's longhouse on the Sagudar tributary," he replied. "They had a ceremony for Warahai today. Warahai was a distant relative of mine so I thought I should attend."

"What ceremony?" I asked. "I thought Warahai was interred nine days ago."

"He was," the man replied. "Tuan, haven't you heard about *gefam ason*? It means 'touching the stench.'"

"No. What is *gefam ason*?"

The man thrust his paddle blade into the ground and looked at me as if ready to speak. Then he thought better of it, made some excuse for having to leave, took his paddle again and started to walk past me.

I laid my hand on his arm. "You better tell me," I said.

"I'm not sure you would approve, Tuan."

"I'll find out later anyway."

He knew that was true. Leaning on his paddle, he began to divulge the ancient horror he had witnessed that very day.

That night Carol and I lay awake, troubled by this newest revelation of the Sawi mind. So this was another of the things Boro had chosen in preference to Christ!

How could such a custom ever have found acceptance in the first place? What awesome sense of tragedy had first spawned it? And how strong, how deep, must the dark compulsion be that made successive generations willingly perpetuate a custom repulsive even to themselves!

Stung by the seeming impossibility of ever comprehending the soul of such an enigma, I groaned aloud into my pillow. What should I do about it? How could I tackle what I could not understand?

I knew it would not be enough simply to tell them: "Look here! Stop doing this! It's not nice!" They already knew it wasn't nice. Obviously the very unniceness of it was somehow related to its purpose, like the deliberate unniceness of the debt-incurring deed in the *waness* bind.

Then my breath stopped in my throat. Could that be it? I sat upright in bed, wondering.

Could the custom called *gefam ason* simply be a way of trying to impose a massive *waness* bind on . . . on not just an individual, but on the whole supernatural world? The idea was forming.

But what could be the purpose of such a large-scale *waness* bind, carried out by unnumbered Sawi over aeons of time? Could it be to coerce an eventual abrogation of death itself? I was determined to check out this hunch. Morning couldn't come fast enough.

Slowly I waded along the flooded corridor between twin rows of Haenam and Yohwi longhouses. The high wailing sound of a Sawi dirge grew louder as I drew close to its source. Sitting enwreathed in smoke beside her fireplace, an old toothless woman was rocking back and forth as she mourned the death of Warahai.

The words of her dirge were mostly unintelligible to me, as her voice was broken with sobbing. I tried in vain to comprehend the message. Then I saw Mahaen. He had come down the stairpole of his home to meet me.

"Mahaen, tell me what the woman is saying."

He replied, "She is saying,

"Words of *remon*! Words of *remon*! Why are you delaying so long? Because of your delay, death has taken my son away!

"Words of *remon*! Words of *remon*! Our eyes are getting red watching for your coming!

"Words of *remon*! Words of *remon*! Will you come from upstream? Will you come from downstream?

"Words of *remon*! Words of *remon*! Hurry, or death will take us all away, and no one will be left to welcome you."

The poignancy of this Sawi poem, set in the grim context of the sorrowing village, and with the accompaniment of the old woman's wailing, was overwhelming. In a voice hushed yet eager I asked, "Mahaen! What is *remon*?" We began to wade toward my thatch-roofed office as Mahaen explained, "*Remon* is what happens when a caterpillar escapes death by transforming into a moth, bursting out of its cocoon to live on in a new body. It also describes the way a lizard or a snake escapes death by shedding its old skin."

Remon, then, was approximately equivalent to our English word "regeneration."

"And what are the *words of remon*?" I questioned.

"It is said that long ago men also possessed the power to *remon* their bodies and keep on living endlessly. Then a lizard and a *karasu* bird had an argument. The lizard, as the symbol of *remon*, said men should remain free from the

power of death. The bird, because it dies so easily, was the symbol of death. He insisted that men should become subject to death like himself, and even started cutting poles for the first gravehouse!"

"What happened?"

"The snake kept saying '*rimi! rimi!* renew! renew!' These were the words of *remon*. But the bird kept saying, '*sanay! sanay!* decay! decay!' The argument went on and on until the lizard gave in to the will of the bird.

From that time on, men began to die."

"Why did the lizard give in?"

"We don't know. Something must have happened, but we've forgotten what it was."

"Is that the end?"

"No. Our ancestors said that someday the words of *remon* will come back to us. After that, those still alive will renew their bodies like the lizard and the caterpillar. There will be no more death."

My whole being thrilled as the utter significance of Mahaen's words bore in upon me. Then I remembered to ask, "And what does the custom of *gefam ason* have to do with all this?"

Mahaen stopped in his tracks and glanced at me quickly. "You know about *gefam ason*?" he asked.

"I know what men must do to fulfill its requirements. What I don't know is why it is necessary."

"We do it because our ancestors did it," he offered flippantly.

It was a favorite Sawi catch-all answer for a thousand difficult questions. I brushed it aside. "You can try an answer like that on your little children, but don't try it on me," I said smiling.

Mahaen laughed. "Really, Tuan, I'm not sure I know any other. . . ." His voice trailed off. He was thinking. He thought for a long time, as I waited ankle deep in the mud, my pen poised over my notebook.

"Perhaps it is. . . ." he began at last, and I wrote down the Sawi as it flowed from him, ". . . *rigav bohos savos keroho farakotai remon sin fatar ni naha saren*

gani! . . . so that when mankind has reached the fullest measure of sorrow, the words of *remon* may come the more quickly!”

I thanked Mahaen and decided to question my other language informants. Some of them would venture no opinion on the significance of *gefam ason*. Others offered opinions similar to Mahaen’s. Still others who had no opinion of their own immediately accepted Mahaen’s opinion when it was suggested to them.

I had found some indication, at least, that the *waness* bind and *gefam ason* both spring from the same root—the belief that ends not attainable by force or ordinary persuasion can be won by subjecting one’s self to extreme humiliation or mortification. In other cultures the same psychological bent may be expressed in such ways as accident proneness, penance, protest fasting, flagellation or self-immolation.

But the New Testament has a single, clear answer for prisoners of this nearly universal complex of compulsions—the humiliation and death of Christ on our behalf! His death alone could impose a *waness* bind upon the laws arrayed against guilty men. His resurrection offers the only hope of *remon* we can ever know! Thus my strategy for dealing with the morbid, almost psychopathic Sawi obsession with the corpses of the dead was emerging.

Sooner or later the Indonesian government would outlaw *gefam ason* for sanitary reasons alone, but this would not remedy the underlying spiritual deficiency which had given birth to the custom in the first place. Sawi culture had struggled through the millenniums without an adequate answer to the despair imposed on man by death. The Christian doctrine of the Resurrection was the God-given antidote to that despair, and Sawi belief in the future return of the words of *remon* was the redemptive analogy through which that antidote could enter.

I summoned the Christians of Haenam, Yohwi and Kamur to a meeting. Hato, Kaiyo, Mahaen and the others listened attentively as I summarized my

argument. I began with Jesus’ raising of His dead friend, Lazarus, and described His own resurrection on the third day after death.

Now I concluded, “He raised others from death. He rose from the dead Himself! He proclaimed Himself to be the Resurrection and the Life in Person! “His words are the words of *remon!* And they have already reached you! They bring you first the *remon* of your inner man through the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, to be followed, according to the promise of Scripture, by the *remon* of your bodies on the Day of Christ!

“You have long said your eyes are red with watching for the promise of *remon*— I hope they are not too red to recognize it now that it is here! And if you believe Jesus’ words are the true words of *remon*, do you still need to practice *gefam ason* on the dead bodies of your loved ones?”

Hato rose immediately to his feet. “Thank God you told us that! Now we can quit that ugly practice!” he exclaimed.

Then he turned to his own relatives and gave them stern instructions, “When it comes my turn to die, let my body rot in peace. If you carry out *gefam ason*, it will mean you really don’t believe the promise of *remon* in Jesus.” His relatives nodded in agreement.

One by one, the other believers stood up and made the same request of their friends that Hato had made. Now, for the Christians at least, the Indonesian government would not need to suppress *gefam ason* among the Sawi, for the gospel was already supplanting it. Even as the believers were still speaking, I stood hushed and amazed before God.

“I thank You, my Father, for laying the groundwork for our ministry to these people. The Sawi were strangers to our Judeo-Christian heritage, yet You so providentially ordained these redemptive analogies within their culture ages ago, so that one day we would find and use them for Your glory. You were concerned, not only to send messengers, but also to prepare a culture to receive their message.

“As You prepared the Hebrews and the Greeks, so also the Sawi were not too insignificant or too pagan to receive this much of Your providence.

“And yet Your Word, not their analogies, is the standard. I see now more than ever why You are called the God of wisdom and the God of love and the God of power. I praise You!”

Chapter 24 THE LONG JOURNEY

Slowly the fifty guests from Mauro village materialized out of the heat-shimmer on the gleaming expanse of the Kidari, warily veering closer in their narrow dugouts. They had accepted our invitation, but. . . .

Alone and solemn, Kani the legend maker stood watching them from the edge of Haenam village. I sensed what was going through his mind. Quietly I stepped up behind him and laid my hand on his shoulder, while a soft morning breeze stirred the *kunai* grass around us. He did not turn to face me.

“Kani,” I said gently. “After all these years, at last I have persuaded these men of Mauro to forget their hate and suspicion and come here to meet with you and your people on this ground. Now you. . . .”

“Tuan!” he interrupted. “They are the very men who killed my brother Huyaham. And they nearly killed me.” Bending an arm behind his back, he touched the ugly scar left on his body by a Mauro spear.”

A pang of apprehension stabbed through me. Had I misjudged the rightness of the moment? Perhaps Kani’s newfound Christian faith was not yet strong enough to restrain the old imperatives in a moment of temptation. The men from Mauro were nearer now, trusting in the assurances I had given them. I could feel their trust reaching out to me across the distance.

“Kani,” I replied, laboring against the sudden dismay welling up within me. “I see the wound on your body, and I understand the even deeper wound within your memory. And I know what your forefathers taught you to do to men who have wronged you, as these men have wronged you. But your forefathers never knew what you and I know, Kani—that the perfect *Tarop* has been given, and *still lives!* Because of that *Tarop*, God has forgiven you, my friend. And because

of that *Tarop*, you also must forgive the men of Mauro. Forgive them, Kani! Forgive them!”

This man who had slain Fushman without mercy turned and looked at me with an expression that was undecipherable. Hopefully I waited for an answer, but none came, even as the sound of Mauro’s paddles reached our ears.

And I thought, “All these years of caring and praying and hoping and waiting . . . have they been in vain? Lord, does this man really believe in You, or have I been deceived?” Today I will know. Today. . . .

The Mauro dugouts swept past us, heading for the moorage at the mouth of the Tumdu tributary. Kani’s eyes followed them.

Sadly I turned away from Kani and headed for the moorage to welcome the guests. As I approached them, I noticed they were looking past me at Kani and at the longhouses of Haenam. They too were remembering. Could they ever forget the fateful day when an ambassador from their village had set out for Haenam never to return?

As I welcomed visitors from Mauro, a shout from the Kamur longhouses beyond our home announced that another party of guests had arrived—the silent, secretive warriors of Wiyar village. Cautiously they too beached their canoes and stood in a tight group while men from Kamur came out to welcome them. But there was one young man in Kamur who I knew would not join in welcoming the men from Wiyar. That young man’s name was Beray. Six years earlier the people of Wiyar had cannibalized Beray’s father.

By mid-morning, not only the guests from Mauro and Wiyar, but also several hundred other Sawi from Esep, Seremeet and Kagas, had beached their canoes in the moorage by the Tumdu. For it was Christmas Day—the day we had chosen for the first large-scale intervillage feast the Sawi tribe had known in living memory. While the flesh of five pigs sizzled over cooking fires, young girls were thrusting sharp sticks through thousands of squirming beetle grubs and

toasting them above the flames as their mothers wrapped hundreds of slender sago loaves in *yohom* leaves for cooking.

The day was trying hard to be a festive one, but the hindrances were many. Many of our visitors, for example, refused to mingle with each other and with the people of Haenam, Yohwi and Kamur. Instead, they stood by themselves in exclusive little groups, watchful and apprehensive.

Then it happened!

A long Kayagar dugout appeared from upstream, bearing a patient who was near death from pneumonia. A group of young men followed me as I walked to the edge of the Kronkel to examine the invalid. I recognized him as Hurip, the Kayagar who had shown that first steel axe to the men of Haenam years before. He was gasping for breath as I knelt beside his dugout and reached for his pulse.

But before I had finished counting Hurip's pulse, a voice—ominous and knife-edged with bitterness—spoke from behind me. "Tuan, you won't give medicine to that man, will you?"

I recognized the voice as that of Amio, Hato's son. Looking over my shoulder, I saw that the speaker's slim, brown body was trembling with emotion.

"You want Hurip to die?" I asked.

"Yes!" Amio hissed.

Anxiously, I rose and faced Amio. "Why?"

I noted that Amio was unarmed, but knew also that one word from him would bring his friends running with weapons. Hurip's Kayagar friends, meanwhile, gripped their spear-paddles tightly. They sensed trouble, even though they could not understand our Sawi conversation.

Amio's voice choked with emotion as he replied: "Remember I told you my father Hato once gave a *tarop* child to the Kayagar, only to learn later that they had killed the baby and devoured it?"

I nodded, and Amio continued, "The man lying in this canoe is the man to whom my father gave that child! He is the same man who killed and devoured my little brother! Tuan, I've been waiting for years for a chance to. . ."

Now I was trembling, too. The Christmas spirit was not coming easily to the banks of the Kronkel that day. Kani, Beray and now Amio . . . was I really being realistic in hoping they would forgive their enemies for Christ's sake? Somehow, sometime, they must forgive, but perhaps it was too soon. . . .

For a moment I stood speechless before Amio, praying for wisdom. Then an old memory stirred in the back of my mind. Reaching out with both hands, I gripped Amio by his earlobes. He was startled, but he did not draw away. He listened carefully while I said: "*Tarop Tim titindakeden!* I plead the Peace Child!"

Amio shot back, "The peace child my father gave to Hurip is dead! Hurip himself killed him!"

"But the Peace Child God gave still lives!" I countered. "And because He lives, you may not take vengeance against Hurip. Forgive him, Amio, for Jesus' sake!"

My fingers still gripped his earlobes.

The conflict on Amio's youthful countenance raged to an almost overwhelming intensity, and then began to subside. Soon it gave way to a glow of new understanding. The next thing I knew, Amio was looking down in gentleness upon his dying enemy Hurip.

I released Amio's earlobes and, as my eyes became misty, said as matter-of-factly as I could, "Amio, I need help to carry Hurip to the medical house."

With deep resolve, Amio squared his shoulders and said, "Tuan, let me carry Hurip alone!"

Two Kayagar lifted Hurip onto Amio's back and watched in awe as the young man bore his semi-conscious burden toward the clinic, where Carol was ready with a freshly-drawn injection. Following Amio, I noticed someone else who had observed Amio's change of heart—Kani. As I passed by, Kani gave me a look that assured me I no longer had any reason to fear his intentions regarding the visitors from Mauro.

Almost dizzy with gladness, I breathed a deep sigh of relief. It was beginning to feel like Christmas Day after all!

After Amio had committed Hurip to Carol's care, we walked together along a path toward the thatch-roofed church where the feast was now ready. Scores of Sawi Christians were mingling with the various groups of still reticent guests who until now had preferred to stay close to their spea rpaddles and their canoes.

One by one these bands of solemn strangers yielded to the kindly persuasion of the believers and began to file toward the church. Wide-eyed and wondering, they stepped under the festive palm branches adorning the entrance and entered the cool, spacious interior, their skin tingling to the unaccustomed feeling of unreserved welcome which seemed to charge the very air they breathed.

Three or four of them, I noticed, looked back with sudden twinges of fear at the distance now separating them from their spear-paddles and their canoes. But then they relaxed, blinking in amazement at the joy radiating from the faces of the transformed men and women whose invitation they had accepted. "Surely it must be true," the eyes of many were saying. "Surely this is a fellowship too real ever to be conquered by the dread possibility of *tuwi asonai man*." It was!

Carol, Stephen, and our second son, Shannon, had joined me by the time the feast began. Together we sat watching as Christian Sawi from many different villages rose and crossed the now crowded meeting house to lay gifts of sago, beetle grubs and wild pork at the feet of former enemies. And while the giving went on and on, the full-throated singing of Sawi Christmas carols swelled around us, thanking God for giving His Son, the greatest gift of all.

Then Isai, now a literate Sawi preacher, rose to his feet and read a verse of Scripture that I had translated for the occasion: "For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given. . . ." The words sank in, and were welcomed with a perception and insight perhaps rare among western Christians. I looked around at the rapt faces of believers who were intent, not with admiration of baubles, ribbon and tinsel—for such could have no meaning to the Sawi—but with

adoration of the Peace Child Himself. It was the adoration of the Peace Child who had been born, not only in Bethlehem, but within their own hearts as well. And my mind went back, back through the years and across the miles to other Christmases I had known—snowy Christmases among the frosty fir trees of my Canadian homeland. But none could compare with this sweltering jungle Christmas with its triumph of the spirit of forgiveness in the hearts of a people for whom revenge had been a way of life.

It had been a long journey, and it was not over yet.

The touch of Stephen's hand brought me back from my reverie. I squeezed his hand and Shannon's, and leaned forward to listen as Isai began to address the assembly. It was the best Christmas I had ever known.

Chapter 25 OUT OF THE ANCESTRAL COCOON

By 1972 the Christian world view was already sinking its roots deep into the Sawi mind. Men who once abused and even tortured their wives as subhuman chattels and slaves now openly acknowledged their rights as loving companions and helpmates. Monogamy was replacing polygamy as the ideal for marriage, though polygamists still retained their plural wives.

Women who once indulged in moodiness, screaming tirades and highly abusive speech now manifested a compelling newness and warmth of personality. Children were no longer being primed for war. Strangers and even former enemies could now accept invitations to feasts without fear of *tuwi asonai man*. *Gefam ason* and the *waness* bind were now only bad memories. Even before the arrival of firm government control, Christian Sawi headmen were beginning to carry out some measure of civil law, although there were still many unbelievers who preferred to solve their local problems with bows, spears, and daggers. And whenever government officers and police patrols penetrated the Sawi domain, they found a respectful welcome from tribespeople who had already been well briefed concerning the policies and programs of civil government.

One of the beliefs which the Sawi had inherited from the distant past was the belief that it was unwise to attempt anything their ancestors had not previously sanctioned. Of course, we had already done considerable violence to this ancient hang-up by hiring them to build the airstrip, the ironwood bridge over the Tumdu and a four-mile-long canal connecting the Kronkel with the next river system to the north. "Digging rivers is a job for the spirits, not for men!" they had whispered when I first suggested this latter project. Nevertheless they completed the canal within a month without suffering any supernatural repercussions.

But the biggest, most mind-stretching challenge yet came when I suggested building the "Sawidome." By 1972, Yohwi had returned and constructed a new village along one side of our airstrip. Seremeet likewise had welcomed an invitation to build along the other side of the airstrip, so now we were a community of four villages with a total population of about eight hundred.

Our meeting house, which had already been enlarged twice, was again far too small even for regular gatherings and could not accommodate even one fifth of the people who thronged two or three times a year to our Christian "love-feasts." On such occasions we had to meet out-of-doors at the mercy of fickle tropical weather. Thus we were made keenly aware of the need for a structure which could accommodate not only the needs of our rapidly growing fellowship at Kamur, but also the swelling crowds which flocked in from surrounding villages on special days.

"It should seat at least a thousand people," I explained to the Sawi church elders. "And must be circular with a cone-shaped roof. Any other design in a building so large will be too weak for monsoon storms, considering the kind of materials we have to work with."

I was not saying anything about our lack of heavy equipment or the inexperience of the workmen who would be involved, the Sawi Christians, nor of the foreman who would supervise the operation—myself.

For several days the elders weighed my suggestion carefully. The decision was entirely theirs to make—the structure would be their property, not mine. They

would need to gather and prepare thousands of poles, tens of thousands of sago leaves for thatch, hundreds of yards of tying vines and other jungle materials for the project. The only contribution from the Tuans' world would be three kegs of steel spikes for the main supports, tools to work with, a few sheets of second-hand aluminum roofing for the uppermost peak of the roof and technical supervision.

Finally they returned to me. "Do you really think we can build it?" they asked. "Men like you who have a tradition of building soaring treehouses can do it," I replied. "If you had no such heritage, I wouldn't even suggest it. This project is simply an extension of the tradition your ancestors started."

The next Lord's Day the Sawi church leaders urged every believing man, woman and child in the congregation to join in the massive project.

"If we think only of ourselves, we can of course make do with a smaller building," Amhwi, the chief elder, explained. "But we together with the Tuan believe we should raise up a building large enough for the believers of all the villages and their friends to gather together under one roof, to hear God's Word and to enjoy this new spirit of oneness which He has given us, a oneness our ancestors never dreamed of.

"It will be a house of peace in which former enemies can sit down together at the Lord's table, and a house of prayer for the tribes around us who are still without God's Word."

"For this you must expect no wages from the Tuan," added another elder. "The Tuan brought God's Word to us, but now we ourselves must accept responsibility for its further advance. If you agree to help, let it be because you love God and want others to receive His Word!"

The response was immediate. A swelling cry of "*Asyfer! Asyfer!* Let's build it! Let's build it!" rose on all sides.

After the Lord's Supper, all the believers joined hands around the plot of ground chosen for the structure. With a spirit of keen anticipation, they dedicated themselves to God for the task. Next day, men began hewing the twenty-four ironwood pillars which would support the weight of the entire

roof. Each pillar was twenty-two feet long and weighed over one-hundredfifty pounds. This task took several weeks.

Then the builders searched through the jungle for twenty-four *sereg* poles averaging about forty feet in length. These were to be the main rafters, each of which would be cantilevered from the top of an ironwood pillar, sloping up at a steep angle toward the peak of the roof. At this point a long-awaited interruption halted the work for a while.

We had just received word by radio that a new RBMU missionary couple, John and Esther Mills from Canada, would arrive within a few days to share our work among the Sawi.

The Christians scattered to the jungle to gather food for a welcoming feast. When at last John and Esther arrived by MAF plane, nearly a thousand Sawi raised a tumultuous cheer, followed by a massive celebration. Then we started work at once on completion of a new dwelling for the Mills.

When this was finished, we turned our attention again to the new conference building. While Sawi men and women continued stockpiling hundreds of cut poles, John Mills tackled the task of joining the rafters to the ironwood pillars and bracing them securely. When this was completed, we marked off a circular area of ground seventy-five feet in diameter, dug out twenty-four holes spaced evenly along its circumference and inserted the base of an ironwood pillar into each hole.

Lacking the services of a large crane, we had to find way to erect each lofty pillar-rafter and hold it steady at the correct angle until clay could be packed around its base. We accomplished this by tying about twelve long vines halfway up the rafter, and then assigning one man to hold each vine taut while others pushed the rafter up with forked poles. Once a rafter had been raised halfway, the men holding the vines were able to pull it up to a fully vertical position.

The men on the vines were also able to keep the rafters from swaying. Whenever a rafter began to lean toward the west, for example, two or three men on the east side would tug on their vines until it came back into an upright position. Similarly, if it leaned north, workers on the south side would correct its lean.

Within two days, all twenty-four cantilevered rafters were soaring high above our heads, leaning inward toward a common center from the tops of the ironwood pillars. I was somewhat dismayed. I had expected the tips of the rafters to dip downward under their own weight, and had made allowance for their curve in planning a roof about forty feet high at the center—the same height as a Sawi treehouse. But they did not curve.

Through some peculiar characteristic of the *sereg* poles, each rafter stayed perfectly straight, as if its upper tip had no weight at all. This meant that the peak of the roof would end up considerably higher than forty feet. Just how much higher I couldn't be sure. The Sawi talent for working fearlessly at treetop heights was going to be a critical factor in completing the project.

Now the second phase of the operation began—tying the rafters together into a rigid cone spanning eighty-two feet of airspace, yet strong enough to withstand the force of monsoon gales sometimes gusting to fifty miles per hour. I recalled an episode from the life of John Paton, a nineteenth century missionary to the New Hebrides: "In a short time the (church) building was completed, and very proud were the Aniwans of their handiwork. The church was sixty-two feet by twenty-four, and the wall was twelve feet high—a good serviceable, suitable building, which all hoped would last for many years.

"But alas! before long a terrific hurricane swept the island, and the church was levelled to the ground."¹ How much greater then might the danger be to our "Sawidome," with a floor area four times greater than the Anivan structure? To strengthen the shell, I instructed the workers to interweave horizontal poles in and out among the upward sloping rafters, much as one would weave a giant

basket. For safety's sake we placed the poles so close together that it would be unlikely for a worker ever to slip between them. As expected, the closer we got to the peak of the roof, the more rigid the cone became. The Sawi were soon amazed to find themselves working fifty and even sixty feet in the air on a structure that refused to quiver even under the weight of twenty men jumping up and down.

The original forty-foot-long rafters, of course, had to be lengthened several times to bring the roof to a peak, which proved to be sixty-two feet above the ground. By extending the roof on the outside of the ironwood pillars, we increased the diameter of the building to eighty-seven feet, with a floor area of nearly six thousand square feet.

Later we raised a twenty-two-foot-tall aluminum spire to the peak of the building and fixed it firmly in place, increasing the total height to eighty-four feet. The spire weighed about three-hundred pounds. Inching it up the forty-five degree slope to its lofty perch took about a half hour of heaving by thirty strong men, encouraged by the cheering of hundreds of people on the ground below. Next we covered the massive roof with thatch made of sago leaves. This took two weeks.

Then we piled up nearly one thousand cubic yards of clay, raising the soil floor under the dome well above the highest flood level. We also shaped it into a huge concave bowl. And the area we excavated on the south side of the church later became—in the rainy seasons—a reflecting pool mirroring the great structure.

To complete the project, benches were needed to seat over one thousand persons. We had no sawmill, so Sawi believers hewed the several hundred boards required by hand.

In June, 1972, the Sawi Christians dedicated their newly completed conference building to the glory of God. Though its thatch occasionally needs repair, the building already has withstood about a dozen monsoon storms without a

quiver. And the Sawi themselves are unaware that they have constructed what is possibly the world's largest circular building of unmilled poles.

The ancient hang-ups no longer inhibit Christian Sawi. Finding the world of their forebears too small, the Sawi are shedding the ancient ancestral cocoon. Now new hopes, soaring like the pinnacle of their Sawidome, stir them toward new horizons both spiritual and secular, though their means of achieving their secular goals are at present still pitifully inadequate.

Yet at the very core of their new world stands something peculiarly related to their own unique past—the story of a Peace Child. It is the story of a Peace Child who, in a very special way, has become their Peace Child, a Peace Child who fulfills their past and guides their future. He is the Strengtheners of the second pillar, which was really always meant to be the first pillar.

Stephen, Shannon and Paul snuggled close to Carol, listening intently as she read from an old, much-handled book. It was the story of the return of the prodigal son:

“And so the son returned to his father, and the father, seeing him afar off, ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son lifted up his voice and wept.”

Carol stopped to ask a question. “Tell me, Shannon, why do you think the son wept?”

My second son's blue eyes grew very thoughtful as he pondered the question. Suddenly he looked up brightly and said: “Because he fell on his neck!”

Carol, Stephen and I dissolved in laughter while Shannon and Paul stared at us in wide-eyed bewilderment.

Outside I heard the soft echo of a bamboo horn. Amhwi was calling the Christians together for an evening class. Leaving Carol and the boys to finish their story, I walked out across our moonlit lawn and followed the streams of people who were heading for Amhwi's class. Sitting down near the back of the crowded classroom, I listened as Amhwi read a passage of Scripture by the light

of a small storm lantern, and listened with amazement as he drew a striking analogy to illustrate it:

“Remember what Kaiyo used to do to those who threatened to break the peace he had established. He pointed them to the *tarop* child, and said, ‘If that child had died, you would be free to do whatever you want to do. But he is not dead. He is still alive, and I am the advocate who is responsible for peace. You may not break the peace! My hand is strong!’

“So also if anyone tempts us to do evil, we should say to him, ‘Look here! God has placed the Spirit of His Peace Child, Jesus, within me. If that Peace Child had died or gone away and left me, I might be free to do the evil you suggest. But He is not dead! Nor has He deserted me! He still lives within me to keep me in the way of goodness, and His hand is strong! I am not free to do the evil you advise!’”

The response from his listeners was enthusiastic. “Those are good words!” or “Yes, let’s all answer just like that!” or “We understand!”

Amhwi continued: “And why is it that we no longer exchange *tarop* children among our villages? It is because God would be offended. He would say, ‘Isn’t My Peace Child good enough? Do you think you have to add your own children to Him?’”

Quietly I slipped out again into the cool night and headed home. Soon I passed the little office where I had labored countless hours on the intricacies of the Sawi language and was now laboring again on the final chapters of the Sawi New Testament. Memories began to flood back, memories that drew me aside into a narrow path branching toward the Tumdu.

I followed the path until it ended on the crest of a knoll of high ground beside the still river. I stared down at the dew-wet *kunai* grass around me, remembering the two men who lay buried beneath it. Two men whom I had learned to love very deeply. Two men who in their lifetime had often looked into me with a closeness of understanding rare on earth.

One was Kaiyo. He had been killed four years earlier, an unexpected victim of a sudden flare-up of violence within Kamur village itself. But the lessons he taught me lived on.

The other? I recalled the day three years earlier when Carol and I had returned from a journey to learn that Hato had died of pneumonia during our absence. So quickly, he was gone. The one-eyed stranger first to touch my hand in that leafy arena which had since become my home; the friend who trusted me even when he couldn’t understand; the seeker who so quickly grasped the Mystery that was seeking him.

Much change had metamorphosed us both until we appeared totally alien to each other. Yet providence had brought us together again. Why? To demonstrate that Christ is the Fulfiller of *every* man’s true self.

I turned slowly from the two unmarked graves and walked along the grassy edge of the Tumdu. Peace seemed to be everywhere and in everything. It was flowing down with the moonlight, twinkling through the stars, shimmering among reflections. It vibrated through birdcalls and Amhwi’s now distant voice. It brought back the memory of another voice which, though now hushed in death, still echoed out of that very different world from which we had come: the firm, commissioning voice of an old, white-haired man:

“You will encounter customs and beliefs which will baffle you, but which must be understood. . . .

“Our Lord is impatient to establish His kingdom of love in those dark places which are now the habitation of cruelty. . . .

“Who will go?”

I remembered how my whole being had responded with a sureness that would tolerate no other option: “*I will!*”

I reached for the gate, and as I touched it, joy swept through me. Joy more than just my own.