

May 1958

A Special Design

Thomas A. Dooley

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Dooley, Thomas A. (1958) "A Special Design," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 25 : No. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol25/iss2/3>

A SPECIAL DESIGN

Thomas A. Dooley, M.D.

Dr. Thomas A. Dooley is the 31-year-old author of the 1956 best seller, DELIVER US FROM EVIL, the story of his work as a Navy doctor amongst the Catholic refugees of North Viet Nam. With the royalties from that book he returned and spent 16 months in the jungles of Laos where he built a small hospital. He recently returned to America and has written a new book on his work in a hut of a hospital. It is to be published this month, The Edge of Tomorrow. He is now currently lecturing around the country and arranging for the departure of the teams of MEDICO of the International Rescue Committee. Anyone interested in this program can reach him at Box 2, Times Square, New York, New York.

I once asked a Chinese communist officer, "Why are you, an educated mandarin, a member of the Communist Party?" His reply was staggering. He said, "I am a communist because you Christians are not very good Christians."

It sounds paradoxical. Upon close analysis it makes sense. Honest self-examination reveals that there is a chasm between what we Christians of the world proclaim ourselves to be, and the actual practice of our lives. There is a great deal of blather and bleat these days about "The Brotherhood of Man," "The Community of Nations," "The Love of Mankind," "The Spirit of Humanity." But to many Asians this looks more like selfish national interests, a community of larger nations to control the smaller, a love of mankind—if that segment of mankind follows our policy—and a spirit of humanity—if that portion of humanity can enter into defense alliances with us.

The pious phrases of democracy do not translate well into Asian tongues. Most Asians could not care less about the magnificence of Mount Vernon, or the glories of flush plumbing. Most of them want their own nation respected, their own dignity upheld, and their own voice heard. At Bandung it was said, "For Centuries we Asians have been voiceless in the world. White men have spoken for us. But from now on the world shall hear the voice of the voiceless."

A few decades ago, a voice from Asia meant little to America. Asia was half a world away. Save for the valiant missionaries who fought the savage jungles of the world, few men had much contact with the "yellow hordes" of Asia. Perhaps it was difficult to "stretch" with our christianity that far. Perhaps it was not always economically feasible. But now, in 1958, the earth has shrunk too much to permit Americans to live in an isolated mansion in the midst of world

slums. Two-thirds of the human race today are miserable. To them adequate medical care is absolutely inaccessible. That is bad enough, but they are maturing, and becoming convinced that their plight is not inevitable. Many blame this situation on the poor administration of their country in the hands of the white man. They are fiercely determined never to be ruled by the white man again. This means rule by any means whatsoever, including economic control. The voice of Asia is being heard and it could well be the herald of world disaster.

If we, of the Judeo-Christian world believe our beliefs, then we recognize our own deep involvement in the lives of men everywhere. If we, as men born in freedom, accept this involvement, then we must accept its challenge. The people of other lands need and seek our service. They do not want our patronage.

Our own country's foreign aid program is doing a great deal to give illustration in deed what we proclaim as our creed. We must continue this if we are to continue to have any form of peace. But a government can go only so far. No government program can ever replace the individual. No foreign economic program can ever replace the individual sense of self-reliance, initiative, or self-responsibility. More must be done and it must be done now.

Distance has dulled our awareness. America is not fully awakened to the realization that medicine is a powerful instrument for international friendship. With

medicine we can project our humanitarian impulses across national boundaries, in a way often unrealizable by the desperately needed, but frequently impetuous, governmental aid programs. From my own personal experiences in a hut of a hospital in Laos, and in the evacuation of more than 650,000 refugees of Viet Nam, I have seen the power of gentleness, the magnificence of kindness. From a moment's glance at the work of such men as Gordon Seagrave, Albert Schweitzer, and Howard Rusk, one can quickly grasp the fact that medicine has a unique role, a special design for destiny.

The role of medicine in human destiny is far above the give and take of national rivalries. Medicine rises above the fears of colonialism, or of domination by selfish foreign interests. And at the same time, medicine affords American doctors a unique opportunity for service to all mankind. Our task, as doctors, is to take care of people who are sick. If this has an accompanying result in aid to our nation's interests, then it is, like mercy, "twice blessed."

Our Judeo-Christian school of philosophy speaks of the oneness of man. All man belongs to man. Man has claims on man. The crisis of our day demands a re-affirmation in practice, of this fundamental belief. We must act it out, each of us, individually.

Abandoning now all academic and auspicious verbiage, let me tell you of a bold and ambitious new program, just inaugurated this February. Under the aegis of the International Rescue Committee, a

Medical International Cooperation program has been formed. MEDICO of the 1950s has a very simple purpose. We are going to offer person-to-person medical service to the peoples of the world who need us. We are not a charity program. Those we care for will pay us, as my patients paid me in Laos. In my hospital in Nam Tha, a delivery costs a chicken, an operation, a pig, pills cost one egg (and frequently I was forced to "split my fee" with the local witch doctor). MEDICO will send medical teams out into the most miserable villages of the world to simply practice our profession, to take care of people who "ain't got it so good." We are not going to try to make new Republicans, or Irish Catholics out of them. We shall not proselytize. We are a non-government, non-sectarian group. We shall train the villagers to maintain that which we build, without any attempts to make them air-conditioned, chrome-plated, tail-finned isomers of Americans. We shall train the local personnel to a level at which they can handle the basic problems of a "jungle general practice." From my experience in Asia, this should take about 18 months.

We shall build nothing beyond their own capacity to maintain after our departure. No generators, no electronic physiotherapy paraphernalia — nothing that the villagers themselves cannot learn to handle.

We aim at no perpetuity. We wish to work ourselves out of a job. We intend to go to whatever distant village the host government

requests. There we shall build, stock, and supply a hospital. Then we will train the personnel. MEDICO wishes to build no dynasties. We want to train indigenous personnel to a level easily reached, without any attempts to make them internationally recognized MD's or RN's. Then when the hut-of-a-hospital is turned over to the host government, the team will move to another area, and build another hospital where the host government so wishes.

I believe that long-range economic aid programs are essential, but indefinite dependence on aid erodes self-respect. MEDICO is aimed at the level of the humanity with whom we shall work, and we intend to work through the host government department of health. We shall endeavor to work ourselves out of a job—as soon as possible.

Each MEDICO team will consist of a physician and several medically trained personnel. Team members will be men and women who are dedicated to service to humanity. MEDICO will enable them to give practical expression of love of mankind—an opportunity altogether too rare amidst the fears and obscurity of our time. We are seeking physicians throughout the country to work with us.

We wish to give capable doctors a place to invest something of their humanity for a few years of their lives.

From the great awareness of the pharmaceutical houses of America, we have already been given more than \$600,000 worth of supplies.

LINACRE QUARTERLY

The financial support is now being solicited from the general public of this country, living in comparative plenty. So far we are not doing so well in this dollar support, but feel that "with the luck of the Irish" and, most of all, the Grace of God we will make it.

We have been formally invited into many Asian countries, and our experience leads us to believe that the host governments will be willing to furnish the assistance, and

personnel needed to complement each team.

We hope that through this program we who believe in God will be better Christians, better men, and closer to Him in our service to "The Least of These."

MEDICO of the International Rescue Committee will not stop the march of communism across the bloody face of the world, but we firmly believe that it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.



Dr. Dooley at a Laos Village sick call