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This week in America
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This Week in America

REV. BENJAMIN MASSE, S.J.

ROBERT DIXSON

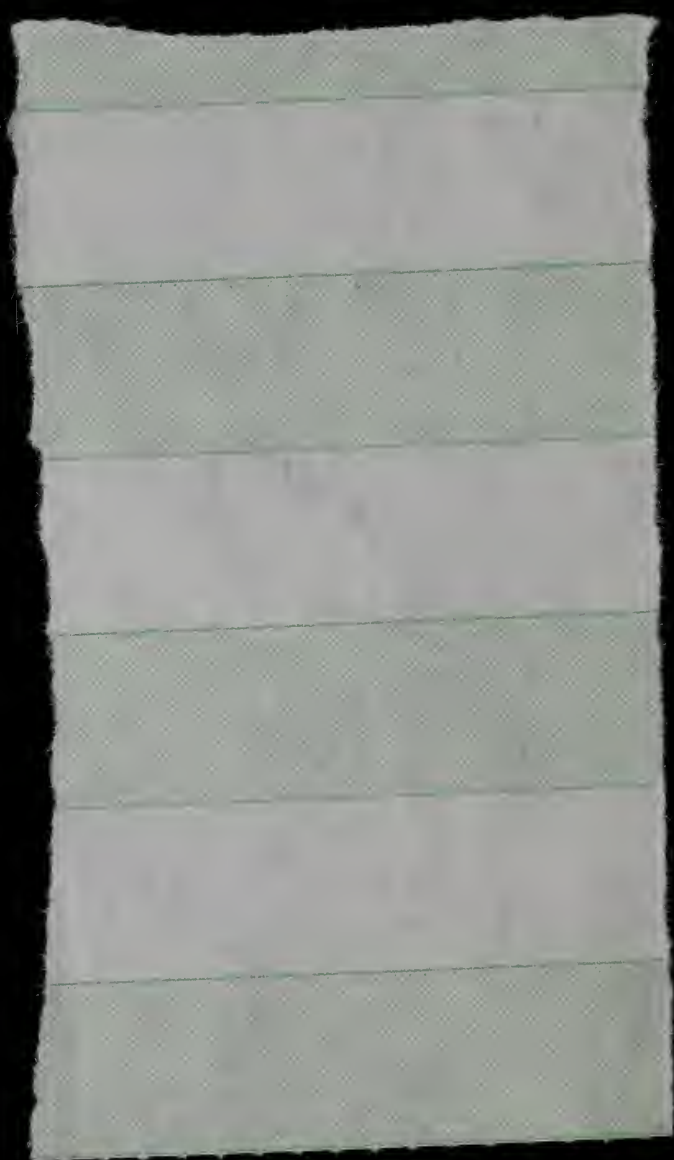
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This Week in America

Reverend Benjamin Masse, S.J., is an Associate Editor of America and an expert on economics and labor-management. Mr. Robert Dixon is the Director of Overseas Operations for Johnson and Johnson.

Mr. Dixon Father Masse it's wonderful. I can't help remarking that life plays some strange tricks on people. I often wanted to sit down with an editor of *America* and put him through a friendly third degree. And now here I have a chance with I don't know how many million people listening in. I'm not sure I like it.

Fr. Masse Well, if it's a strain on you to ask questions, imagine how I feel trying to answer them. I know several places I'd rather be right now than here in the studio.

Mr. Dixon You wouldn't be thinking of a golf course by any chance?

Fr. Masse I might be at that.

Mr. Dixon Speaking of golf courses

reminds me that the steadily increasing cost of the game is about the only economic question you editors haven't treated in recent years. I have often wondered why you give so much of your valuable space to economic questions?

Fr. Masse *America* is a review of the week, and as such our subject matter is largely determined by what happens during the week. Much that happens concerns how men and women go about the old problem of providing food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their children, and of putting something aside for a possibly rainy future.

Mr. Dixon I can see that, of course. In fact, since the Kremlin switched the emphasis in the cold war from the military to the economic, there is more economic news in the press than ever.

Fr. Masse I may say that at *America* we have been conscious of the critical importance of economic developments abroad as well as at home long before the "new look" in Moscow. You may remember, as a longtime reader, that we supported the Marshall Plan and technical aid to underdeveloped countries from the moment these programs were first proposed. We also went to bat for lower

tariffs and private investment abroad.

Mr. Dixon I sometimes wondered whether you took your stand in favor of foreign aid primarily to stop communism, or for some other reason. I know you didn't do it just to impose heavier tax burdens on the American people.

Fr. Masse No, of course not. We are not unaware of the big sacrifices the American people have made. We did, of course, support foreign aid to stop the spread of communism. We also supported it to promote the security and well-being of our country. But the most important reason for our stand was that, as we saw it, this country had a moral obligation to help other countries. We had an obligation, that is, arising out of charity, if not justice, to give a helping hand to others.

Mr. Dixon That raises, I think, a still bigger question. Let me retrace our steps a little. You explained a moment ago that the news determines the large amount of space you give to social and economic questions. I don't think that completely explains the intense concern you have for such questions. Isn't there something else behind your emphasis?

Fr. Masse Yes, there is. As a Catholic review we naturally reflect the interests and concerns of the Holy Father and of the Bishops. For the past century, the Church has been very keenly interested in the impact of the industrial revolution on the spiritual and material welfare of people. This has been a revolutionary period. It still is. We have not yet solved all the problems raised by the transition from an agricultural and handicraft society to an industrial society. As the underdeveloped countries experience the first pains of that shift, the technologically advanced nations find themselves obliged to cope with automation and atomic energy. The Church feels that much suffering and strife could be avoided if the final purpose of economic life were more widely recognized than it is and more sincerely accepted. That purpose, I might add, is to lay a sound material basis for the cultural progress and spiritual perfection of human beings.

Mr. Dixon This means, I take it, that your fundamental approach to economic problems, say the problem of housing, or labor-management relations, or ownership, or wages, is a moral, rather than a technical approach.

Fr. Masse Certainly, our approach is fundamentally moral. We are primarily intent on setting forth the moral principles governing property, the role of the state, the function of private groups, like labor unions and trade associations.

Mr. Dixon But you don't stop there. I have seen *America* deal with some fairly specific problems, such as amendments to the Social Security Act, right-to-work laws, the price of copper and steel. It seems to me that sometimes you go rather deeply into the technical side of things.

Fr. Masse Naturally we don't content ourselves merely with stating general moral principles. We try to apply the principles to concrete situations. This supposes technical knowledge — the more the better.

Mr. Dixon When you get your teeth into things this way, you don't expect all your readers, even your Catholic readers, to buy everything you say.

Fr. Masse I'm glad you asked that one. We don't expect our readers always to agree with us. *America* is not an "official" magazine. It is not the voice of the Pope, or of the American hierarchy, or even of the Jesuits. When we apply a

principle to some involved problem, or when we show a preference for one technical answer to a question over another, our conclusion is only as good as the reasons we adduce to support it.

Mr. Dixon Do you mind pursuing this point more in detail? Take housing. I suppose that first of all you explain the moral principles involved.

Fr. Masse Yes. We explain that human dignity demands decent housing. We note the connection between housing and family life.

Mr. Dixon I assume that if a lack of such housing existed, or if such housing was out of the reach of lower income families, you would warn and exhort editorially. You would then be applying rather than just explaining your moral principles?

Fr. Masse We might even find ourselves involved in the continuing controversy over Federal and State housing programs. But before we got this far, we would have to explain still other moral principles. It is, for instance, a fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching that individuals, either alone or in groups, must do what they can to solve

their problems. This holds for housing, for labor-management relations, medical care, for just about anything you care to mention. But if private groups cannot solve a serious shortage of low-rent housing, if private enterprise cannot build houses which people with low and medium incomes can afford, then and only then the State has the right and duty to supply the lack.

Mr. Dixon It is at this point, I assume, that some of your readers might disagree with you.

Fr. Masse Probably none of our readers would disagree with the general principle — that circumstances sometimes justify a public-housing program. Where some might disagree is on our estimate of the need for a public-housing program at this particular time. Even those who accepted the need might differ with us on the number of units the government ought to build, holding out for a more modest program than we favor.

Mr. Dixon And some might want a more ambitious program.

Fr. Masse Yes, on many of these controversial questions there is among Catholics a right, left and center.

Mr. Dixon Do you think these differences are a good thing?

Fr. Masse Within limits, yes.

Mr. Dixon Within limits? Oh, I think I see what you mean. Sometimes differences of opinion, or their sharpness, may arise from a lack of familiarity with the Church's social teaching, or from an inadequate knowledge of the economic facts. That sounds like an argument for subscribing to *America* or some similar magazine.

Fr. Masse Well, if it is, it's only by implication. There are no commercials on this program. Consider it rather an argument for studying the great social documents of the church.

Mr. Dixon I see a possible complication in all this. With the Federal Government so deeply involved in economic affairs, it must be difficult to comment on legislation without seeming to be engaged in party politics.

Fr. Masse It is, especially around election time. Actually we are not engaged in partisan politics. We are not, that is a Republican paper, or a Democratic paper. Our stand on legislative

proposals is determined by our moral principles. That one or the other party takes the same position is purely accidental.

Mr. Dixon Do you mind shifting to industrial relations for a moment? Why does the impression exist among some employers that the Catholic Church in general and *America* in particular are pro-labor and anti-management?

Fr. Masse For the same reason, I suppose, that Socialists regard us as pro-capitalistic. We favor a system of private enterprise because we believe that the right to private ownership is a natural right, that is, a God-given right. Similarly we favor unions and collective bargaining because the right of workers to organize is also a natural right. Way back in 1891 Pope Leo XIII settled that question once and for all.

Mr. Dixon But you don't consider all unions good, do you? You don't write a blank check for them?

Fr. Masse We don't write editorial blank checks for anybody. Abuses are abuses wherever they are found — in unions as well as in corporations. We do not believe, however, in getting rid of

abuses by socializing property and wiping out unions. We try to keep abuses in proper perspective.

Mr. Dixon Maybe that is why *America* sometimes seems overly optimistic about the progress of industrial relations in this country.

Fr. Masse That could be. We think there has been great progress. Recently we had a big steel strike in this country. Don't you agree there was a vast difference between that strike and the "Little Steel" strike before World War II?

Mr. Dixon Yes. There is less violence; rarely today are heads broken, or lives lost, or property destroyed. There is more employer acceptance of collective bargaining. Both sides have made progress in the art of bargaining collectively.

Fr. Masse To us this seems very important. It is always a matter of concern that institutions founded on the natural law, institutions that develop in accord with the nature God has given men, grow and flourish. Such institutions give a healthy tone to society. It is not inconceivable that if the institution of

collective bargaining broke down, our democratic society would be gravely endangered. There is no collective bargaining, there are no free trade unions in dictatorships. And there is no freedom for business either.

Mr. Dixon Perhaps in our "cold war" propaganda, we do not emphasize that point sufficiently. The Communists claim to be a working-class party. They look upon the Soviet Union as the workers' fatherland — call it a proletarian paradise. But it is a paradise in which workers do not have the elementary right of free organization. Yet in the capitalistic United States they do have that right.

Fr. Masse There is more to it than that. Marxists regard collective bargaining as a fraud and a delusion. According to their theory, capitalism necessarily exploits workers. Between workers and employers there is inevitable enmity. So they logically preach class warfare. Workers can free themselves from their bonds, they insist, only by destroying the exploiters. To the extent that our unions and employers make collective bargaining work, they are punching this Communist dogma full of holes; they are winning an important battle in the cold war. That is another reason why *America*

tries to deal with industrial relations in a constructive, hopeful way.

Mr. Dixon I don't suppose there is time to pursue this question further. But I cannot help observing that from *America's* standpoint the racketeers who prey on unions are not just crooks who ought to be behind the bars, but are also traitors to the free world in the cold war.

Fr. Masse Exactly. And so are anti-union employers. So are all those, on both the labor' and management side, who by their greed and irresponsibility injure the institution of collective bargaining.

Mr. Dixon In all these questions we don't seem to get very far from morality. Not only must economic institutions conform to the natural law which God has impressed on our natures, but as individuals men must serve God, too.

Fr. Masse That is an excellent summary, a perfect summary, of the viewpoint that guides everything we write at *America*. In the last analysis a society is no stronger than the men and women who compose it. Unless we maintain a high moral tone in our public as well as in our private lives, our society, for all

its rich traditions and technical virtuosity, will sooner or later disintegrate. It will go the way of all flesh. Especially today, when every value we cherish in life is challenged by the most ruthless and anti-human force the world has ever seen, we must maintain in their integrity the religious beliefs and moral code of our ancestors. These are, after all, the values which distinguish us from the enemy.

To keep this cardinal fact before our people — before our workers, farmers and employers — is our prime objective at *America*. In the long run, unless the great issue of our times should be decided by hydrogen and atomic bombs, it will be the moral stamina of our people, even more than their material accomplishments, that will assure eventually the triumph of the cause of freedom and human dignity. This we trust and firmly believe is God's cause.

Mr. Dixson To that I can only add a hearty Amen. I am sure that our listeners will also. I hope they have enjoyed learning what makes *America* tick as much as I have.

Fr. Masse And to that I can only add a hearty Amen, too. May God bless them all.

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