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Genuine love of country - with a reminder of some flaws

Tony Magliano | Jun. 24, 2013 Making a Difference

July Fourth -- Independence Day -- is unquestionably America's most patriotic holiday. It's a time to take pride in the nation's great accomplishments and in the freedoms enjoyed by many.

On the other hand, America has its share of flaws. A genuine love of country acknowledges the flaws and tirelessly strives to mend them.

Countless people in the United States and beyond its borders suffer greatly from arrogant, insensitive and greedy decisions made by many of our nation's government and corporate leaders.

Some wealthy American corporations like Wal-Mart contract with sweatshops in poor countries like Bangladesh, where workers labor in miserable conditions for pennies an hour [1] while U.S. CEOs and stockholders rake in enormous profits and American consumers benefit from "everyday low prices."

Congress gives large subsidies to rich agribusiness as well as to oil and coal corporate polluters while needy small- and medium-size family farmers and clean-energy companies get a smaller piece of the pie. Much of the American "entertainment industry" continues to infect society with endless sex and violence.

The U.S. government spends more money on its military -- approximately $682.5 billion in 2012 in the Department of Defense alone -- than the military budgets of the next 10 governments combined, including China and Russia, according to *The Economist* [2].

The United States, which has the world's most dangerous nuclear arsenal, has many of its missiles dangerously programmed to quickly launch on warning, said Bruce Blair, executive director of Global Zero [3]. And as the world's leading arms merchant, the United States helps fuel various armed conflicts [4] around the globe.

"The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which injures the poor to an intolerable degree," said the world's Catholic bishops at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

With drone assassinations and more than 700 military bases spanning the world [5], the U.S. is often seen more as a threatening empire than a good neighbor. While treaties like the North American Free Trade Agreement [6] open Mexican markets to American merchandise, they also displace many Mexican small businesses and workers who cannot compete with subsidized U.S. goods. When these workers migrate north of the border to replace their lost jobs, many Americans object to their presence.

Every year, approximately 1.2 million unborn babies in the U.S. are aborted [7], and now President Barack Obama's administration wants all institutions, including Catholic ones, to provide birth control to its employees [8].

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to tirelessly pray and work to correct these evils, not ignore them. A genuine love of country seeks what is morally best for it. A genuine love of country challenges choices and attitudes that

do harm to anyone inside or outside its borders.

A genuine love of country does not mean making a nation into an idol. Only God is perfectly good. Speaking and acting as though one's nation is beyond correction makes that nation a god and seriously breaks the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God ... you shall not have other gods before me."

Katharine Lee Bates' famous anthem "America the Beautiful" inspiringly offers wise guidance here: "America! America! God mend thine every flaw. Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law. ... America! America! God shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea."

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about the principles of Catholic social teaching. His email address is tmag@zoominternet.net [9].]

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