NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Can any good come out of Chicago?

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Sep. 30, 2010 Bulletins from the Human Side

Yes, in church and state

Chicago has become the media?s favorite shooting gallery.

?Chicago-style? is like buckshot for snide commentators who feel they can?t miss if they use it to blast away at anything they don?t like in current national politics. Most of these itchy fingered observers do not live in Chicago, many have never even been there, and, from studying them, they don?t seem to know much beyond what they learn from their own papers -- which, of course, they write that themselves.

The media leave the nation wondering, ?Can any good come out of Chicago??

Yes, Chicago can respond, pointing to everything that stuns visitors about the city that, like no other in the world, remembers its ordinary citizens.

That is why -- battling off piratical developers who would have rimmed it with breweries and factories -- it has preserved its lakefront with beaches, parks, and boat slips for the average families of the city.

Against all calculations and claims to the contrary, Chicago probably has the cleanest elections in the country if only because they are watched so intently by all interested parties and some disinterested ones -- such as the Feds and the State?s Attorney?s office.

Politics, as Mister Dooley long ago observed, are not ?beanbag? in Chicago but they are safe to eat compared to the contaminated plates served up in many other big cities and some small ones too. Think Bell, California, and its millionaire administrators.

There is plenty of good in the church as well. For generations it led the country in pastoral and liturgical innovation. Half a century ago the Chicago archdiocese supported counseling education for its priests, an initiative soon imitated across the country. Pat and Patty Crowley brought the Cana Movement to life in Chicago and personified the lay participation in Catholicism that flourished there as it did nowhere else. Chicago?s priests became deeply involved in racial justice and, spurred by leaders like the late Msgr. Jack Egan, were at the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.?s side as he marched heroically to bring racial equality to America.

Chicago led as well in progressive seminary education in the Family Life Movement -- and in implementing the decrees of Vatican II in models that could be followed by other dioceses throughout the country. In 1966 its priests organized the Association of Chicago Priests that became the inspiration for establishing priests? councils across the country. Then Fr. Frank Bonnike -- from close enough to Chicago to be counted in it -- became its first president and made it a factor in representing priests and, among other things, winning for them retirement plans that had been denied to them before.

Forty years ago, in another great Chicago initiative, Marty Hegarty and three

other former archdiocesan priests, founded WEORC [1], to assist former priests and religious find jobs after leaving the active ministry and to work, later with Cardinal Bernardin's support, to get them other benefits.

Those who complain that Chicago gave America Al Capone forget that it also gave the country Joseph Bernardin, the last churchman whose judgment was so trusted by the body of bishops that they accepted the skilful compromises that allowed the Bishops? Conference to be both relevant and orthodox as it took on many initiatives -- including pastoral letters on peace and on the economy. After surviving a false accusation of having sexually molested a seminarian, Bernardin redoubled his efforts to combat the problem and produced guidelines that became blueprints for the church throughout the country.

Critics have now shifted their prejudiced analysis to Chicago?s retiring mayor, Richard M. Daley.

The mayor?s achievements must be very threatening to the pundits who are now firing the noisy but blank cartridges of ?Boss,? ?Patronage,? ?Machine,? and -- as if nobody ever sniffed the odors of political decay in, among urban centers, Jersey City, Providence, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and inside the very beltway of Washington D.C. -- they write of the ?whiff of corruption? in the wind of Daley?s administration. They seem disappointed that it emanates from minor officials, hacks, and hangers-on and that nobody has accused Daley himself of anything but running the city very well.

Chicago experienced one of its most extraordinary moments when Daley, flanked by his wife, Maggie, and surrounded by their children, recently announced that he would not seek re-election. Although interpreters hypothesized possible negative understandings -- ?Is he afraid of being indicted?? some asked -- few if any grasped the most obvious motivation for a refreshing if poignant scene.

Daley was acting nobly, putting aside the job he loves for the wife and family he loves even more.

How remarkable to see a public official who was not letting his family stand aside so that he could move ahead or letting his wife absorb the shame as he confessed an extra-marital affair; nor was he bidding them goodbye before he departed for the nearest minimum security prison.

How moving -- after having Blago (former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich), who wears number 45 sun lotion for protection from the limelight, embarrass Chicago with months of bombastic self-promotion, even selling his wife off to the highest paying reality show -- to watch Daley quietly stepping back and, in the tradition of noble knights and in very few direct words, gently placing his fair lady and family first by letting go of power and choosing love instead.

Noble fits Daley in other ways as well. Its root is *gno* and means ?to know how to? -- as in knowing how to run a large city that, when he took office, had been termed ?Beirut on the Lake? because of the ?City Council Wars? and the racist and stuttering management of the previous years.

Under Daley Chicago healed its wounds, prospered, and -- thanks to the White Sox -- even won a World Series. Being noble, of course, does not mean being perfect and Daley himself recognizes the many problems -- financial and other -- that he will no longer confront.

Who could argue that noble applies to Daley in its meaning, ?possessing heraldic rank in a political system?? The Daleys have also displayed the ?greatness and magnanimity? that the term connotes. Both father and son brought a love for Chicago into their fifth floor office in City Hall.

What reformers criticized as a patronage system was actually an exercise in representative government as well. It provided precinct captains -- who were certainly loyal to the administration -- direct links to the neighborhoods whose homeowners could express their needs and voice their complaints to City Hall.

Noble also refers to metals that are ?corrosive proof,? a quality that, despite years of snoopers trying to prove otherwise, also inheres in our retiring Mayor.

While on a boat with the mayor one summer evening, as he stood with the candelabra of the city lights softly beyond him I asked him why he had planted so many trees and flowers throughout Chicago.

?I can?t solve people?s personal problems or their other difficulties,? he replied, ?but I can make the city beautiful for them when they step out of their houses to start their days.?

That is a truly noble thought to be expressed by any public official. His father?s vision of average citizens fishing in the Chicago River has come true perhaps because he understood -- as his son does -- what being a mayor means.

At a meeting of mayors in the riot struck 1960s, the elder Daley listened to New York?s then-Mayor John V. Lindsay talk at length about the need to ?walk the city in the long hot summers.? After Lindsay concluded, that Daley observed, ?John, you forget why you were elected. You were elected to collect the garbage.?

A homely nobility resides in that fundamental sense of delivering services to the people. Any hopeful successors to Daley should reflect on whether they are out to give or get something from being Mayor of Chicago.

Saul Bellow wrote of our ?universal eligibility to be noble.? Daley understands that concept and it explains why his ?Chicago-style? could be imitated by officials everywhere.
On no day of his remarkable career did Daley demonstrate his own nobility more clearly than on that afternoon when he publicly chose his wife and family over the continuing glory of political life.

[Eugene Cullen Kennedy is emeritus professor of psychology at Loyola University, Chicago.]

Editor's Note: We can send you an e-mail alert every time Kennedy's column, Bulletins from the Human Side," is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: **E-mail alert sign-up** [2]. If you already receive e-mail alerts from us, click on the "update my profile" button to add Kennedy to your list.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/21/2014 - 07:38*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/bulletins-human-side/can-any-good-come-out-chicago

Links:
[1] http://weorc.blogspot.com/
[2] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup