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Eugene J. Halus, Jr.

The Conflicted Catholic Ethnic

Dennis Clark is one of a cadre of American activists who have been largely forgotten in the scholarly literature of urban history and politics, church history and ethnic studies. Clark is in fact someone who should be remembered for the significant and sometimes deeply contradictory role he played as an historian, political activist, and lay activist within the Roman Catholic Church. Before dying of cancer at the age of 66 in 1993 Clark would write at least eight books, contribute multiple book chapters and numerous articles on a diverse number of topics. He would also leave behind a number of manuscripts both fiction and nonfiction. The majority of Clark's efforts focused upon documenting the history of the Irish in Philadelphia from colonial times to the early 1990s when he published *Erin's Heirs: Irish Bonds of Community*, but Clark's intention was not simply to document the Irish experience in Philadelphia. He strongly agreed with the Italian-American activist Monsignor Geno Baroni that race relations in America would only improve if ethnic groups first understood themselves. Until they did this they could not effectively deal with the racial/ethnic tensions that pervaded so much of American politics and civic culture in the latter part of the twentieth century. Clark's extensive efforts at documenting the Irish experience in Philadelphia were intended to be both formal social, political and religious history and a pedagogical tool for understanding the Irish experience in the United States. Clark also wrote a number of articles or book chapters that stand as academic political histories of various components of Philadelphia's past.¹ These too were meant to expand historical understanding. Clark believed strongly in the idea that place plays a significant role in defining identity, so he was concerned with pro-

1. See Joseph S. Clark, Jr. and Dennis J. Clark, "Rally and Relapse, 1946-1968" in Russell F. Weigley, editor, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 649-703 and Dennis J. Clark, "Bicentennial Philadelphia: A Quaking City" in Dennis J. Clark, editor, *Philadelphia, 1776-2076* (Port Washington, N.Y.: National University Publications, 1975), 69-98.

moting understanding through an analysis of the place where he in fact stood—Philadelphia. He was also deeply concerned with urban issues, race relations and the role of the church in relation to both issues. Clark wrote books and articles largely as an attempt to give some direction and guidance regarding what efforts and policies should be pursued in relation to urban and racial issues.²

Clark grew up in Philadelphia and attended in the city what was then St. Joseph's College (now university), and in his forties he completed graduate studies and earned a doctorate in history at Temple University. Over the years Clark would succeed Father John LaFarge, S.J., as head of the Catholic Interracial Council and edit the *Interracial Review*, teach part or full time at Saint Joseph's College, Penn State University, Temple University and later in his career at Villanova University, work as a housing specialist for the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission, serve on the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations as a supervisor in its housing division, work for the Philadelphia Housing Authority, and serve as the executive director of the Samuel Fels Fund, a Philadelphia-based foundation supporting science, education, the arts and community service. Throughout all of these experiences Clark was struggling to reconcile within himself a clearer understanding of the Roman Catholic Church's role in promoting integration and social justice, his own ethnic identity and that of his fellow Irish, while involving himself with segments of Philadelphia's Democratic Party that were at times openly anti-Catholic and anti-ethnic. Clark tried to reconcile those contradictions, often unsuccessfully, for much of his life. The contradictions would instead exist almost simultaneously within the man and never develop into one definitive and coherent world view. His life would in effect confirm on a personal level what Monsignor Geno Baroni asserted about ethnic self-understanding and race relations. Clark was never able to reconcile the issue of race with the urban ethnic experience of Philadelphia's Irish because he does not seem to have ever fully understood himself.

There are many who knew Dennis Clark who would be highly critical of any assertion that he never developed a definitive and coherent worldview, or that he could not reconcile his internal contradictions even though Clark himself wrote about these very things in his diary.³ Clark was clearly a difficult and multifaceted character, and interpretations of that character lead inevitably to debate as no one person, except for perhaps his wife, probably was able to ever see Clark in his entirety. Like George Orwell, he seems to have been a man who compartmentalized his life so that friends and acquaintances only saw parts of Dennis Clark never the whole man. Many close friends of Clark's have recounted his wit, his effusiveness, and his charm. He is sometimes recalled as the perennial Irishmen, who was capable of concisely explaining the realities of the Irish Catholic working class experience in all its aspects during a time

2. See Dennis J. Clark, *The Ghetto Game* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962) and *Cities in Crisis: The Christian Response* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), for examples.

3. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, January 16, 1982, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

when Irishness was not always viewed in a positive light. All of this is true to Clark's character, but at the same time others who knew Clark had experiences of a taciturn and brooding Clark who could at times become almost the stereotype of the maudlin Irish. Both are probably accurate depictions of the complicated man that Clark was. This is a point made all the more apparent by Clark's own diaries which would more often represent the taciturn and brooding Clark than they would the Irish wit. The diaries are often simply more pessimistic in tone than anything Clark's contemporaries' recall. The job of the historian is to try and strike a balance between these two poles, and that is what was attempted here. Clark's diaries are given more weight than perhaps some would like, but they seem to be within the historical record the most honest representation by Clark of his own mind. Clark is at end somewhat of a tragic figure, and his story is made all the more tragic due to the fact that he was well meaning, likeable, and generally decent in character. Considering the additional value of his scholarship on Philadelphia's Irish and he becomes even more tragic because of that work's value and groundbreaking nature. He wrote Irish-American history when much of academia cared little for it, and many of his contemporaries did not recognize the importance or the difficulties of his scholarly pursuits.

Clark as Catholic Layman

Until the publication of his first book *Cities in Crisis: The Christian Response*, Clark was clearly developing into the sort of Catholic intellectual that would be described as being in the liberal Jesuit tradition. He read extensively in components of philosophy, literature and theology and was especially engaged by the writings of Christopher Dawson. Much of what he read was done as part of a great books discussion group organized by fellow St. Joseph's College alumni and very Jesuit in its tone. Even as Clark became more interested in urban issues and integration he continued to initially do so through a traditionally Catholic lense. By the early 1950s, however, it is also apparent that Clark was involving himself with components of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia that were concerned with social justice issues, especially race relations, and his worldview begins to change.⁴ As Clark began to believe that the Catholic Church had not fully embraced its role as a public institution responsible for promoting social justice he would become increasingly critical of the church as an institution, and would himself cease to be a practicing Catholic. For lack of a better term, Clark beginning in the early 1960s, became a cultural Catholic and would in some ways wax nostalgic about the church for the rest of his life, but increasingly the reality was a man fallen away from the Catholic faith.⁵

4. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, November 17, 1952, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and Edward Schmitt, "A Vocation for Neighborliness: Anna McGarry's Quest for Community in Philadelphia," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 81-97.

5. Clark never dealt with his drift away from institutional Catholicism in any of his published works, but he did keep a diary that shows the great difficulty he had in reconciling his faith with his other beliefs and the frustrations he felt regarding it. Publicly though he went from being a Jesuit trained Catholic

It made for a paradox in Clark's character. In his personal behavior it is clear that the Catholic tradition had a great effect upon Clark, but to family and friends he expressed little sympathy for organized religion. Clark had great difficulty with the church as an institution, while continuing to have a belief in some of its basic theology and its teachings on social justice.⁶ Clark was in some ways more in church on a Sunday than many of the practicing Catholics sitting in the pews in terms of his efforts to put church social teachings into practice in American society.

Cities in Crisis: The Christian Response is an interesting work that tries to define a role for the lay apostolate within the framework of the emerging urban crisis. Clark openly criticizes the church for not opening itself up to a greater role for the laity and the persistence of clericalism, which he then asserts inhibits the church's ability to respond to both the problems of the city and the overall general decline in American culture that has affected individuals, families and neighborhoods.⁷ He also notes an increasingly anti-religious overtone to the culture of the modern city. Clark's most powerful and pragmatic criticism, however, is the lack of any coherent and consistent social teachings by the church regarding "modern urbanism," and the church's failure to fully address or engage the issue.⁸ By "modern urbanism" Clark encapsulates a number of issues including the decline of the family, housing, integration, race/ethnicity and a general crisis in the ability of urban elites, mainly WASP patricians, to effectively lead society. In spite of the crisis of "modern urbanism" Clark almost immediately sides with patrician Philadelphia as the only viable source of order and hope for the city after having criticized them for having lost touch with the rest of urban America and their substantial anti-Catholicism.⁹ This would be a pattern that

intellectual to a cultural Catholic focused upon urban and ethnic history, and never commented on how a reader might reconcile his earlier work with his later work. For examples of this point see *Diary*, September 16, 1968 and February 10, 1991, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

6. Clark notes in his diaries the importance of the Salesians who taught him in high school in forming his understandings of social justice. See Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, Box 18, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. A bibliographic note is important here. In the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania there is a slight aberration to the archival holdings related to Dennis Clark. Some of Clark's papers are preserved in boxes, while others, specifically Box 20, are listed as being boxes in the archives files but are in fact microfilm held in an entirely different part of the archive. This should explain to the reader the reason for the changing citations related to the archival holdings on Clark, and save future scholars from having to hunt for these materials as the author did.

7. Clark's prescience on this matter must be acknowledged. The recent problems of the church sex abuse crisis, its accompanying financial crisis and the decline in vocations have roots that extend back at least as far as 1960, and Clark captures this point intuitively.

8. *Cities in Crisis: The Christian Response* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 125.

9. *Cities in Crisis: The Christian Response* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 4-5. Clark's hesitancy to criticize the patricians weakens what would otherwise be a rather profound insight. It should also be noted that it is the sort of criticism Christopher Lasch would offer over three decades later in his *The Revolt of the Elites or the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). A comment should also be made regarding the use of the term patrician. Unlike other major urban areas in the United States one's family name, breeding and education counted perhaps more than wealth for inclusion into Philadelphia's ruling class. This was especially true until about the 1960s when the patrician class had begun to suburbanize. Clark desperately tried to gain access to patrician Philadelphia, but is not fully honest with himself

appeared again and again in both Clark's writings and actions throughout his career. He was never able to reconcile the fact that his political allies and even sometimes his employers were very often the very same people he sometimes implicitly criticized quite heavily in his published and private writings.¹⁰ Late in his life he would confide to his diary that it had perhaps been a mistake to ally himself with Joseph Clark, Richardson Dilworth and the Americans for Democratic Action network because of their failure to acknowledge the importance of ethnicity and Catholicism for Democratic politics.¹¹ Clark felt similarly about a number of issues and constantly strained between the world he wanted to be a part of, the world from which he came, and the world in which he actually lived as an adult. To be fair to Clark, the difficulty of his choice must be acknowledged. In the Philadelphia of his day one had only three choices—a Republican Party, that at one point was one of two Irish-American Republican machines in the country, recently collapsed under the weight of its own corruption in the early 1950s, an ethnically dominated cadre of Democrats, or the Democratic Reformers. The ethnic Democrats would seem the natural choice for Clark, but they were mainly machine Democrats with little interest in the public policy issues that concerned Clark. In some cases, especially related to issues of integration, they would have viewed Clark's political beliefs and his efforts to push integration as an act of betrayal.

Clark's seemingly contradictory actions and beliefs emerge from the rather complicated reality that was the man himself.¹² Clark was born in the Kensington section of Philadelphia in 1927 and watched his father desperately struggle to find regular work only to be reduced to a tearful and hopeless man at times bereft of any regular employment. The lack of an adequate and regular income also meant that Clark moved, according to Clark himself, ten times in the first twelve years of his life. His early life was transitory and the only constancy seemed to be the Roman Catholic Church, which must have had a profound effect upon the man and his personality. Even in later life as he became increasingly a cultural Catholic the church was still a significant influence on his life, but by that point his relationship with the church was complicated and contradictory mainly due to the issue of integration and Clark's belief that the church should be more concerned with issues of social justice. A point

about two things. He did not have the appropriate breeding and education to ever be considered a patrician, nor did he ever acknowledge the sometimes subtle anti-Catholicism of the patrician class. Yet in his private diaries Clark recounts rather bitterly that after earning a doctorate in history from Temple he was "dumped" by the graduate sociology program at the University of Pennsylvania after he had earned eighteen graduate credits for what he called "wholly gratuitous and capricious reasons." See Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, March 7, 1976, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

10. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, March 7, 1976 and June 12, 1984, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

11. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, March 7, 1976 and June 12, 1984, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

12. Dennis Clark, *Diaries* (in both the microfilm and paper holdings), numerous entries by Clark throughout the 1970s and 1980s continually reinforce the complicated and contradictory reality of his belief system.

that on the surface seemed to puzzle him, but in reality seems to be something he could not admit to himself. Had he admitted the significance of the church to his own personal development he would have had to alter much of his public position on the church, urban neighborhoods, and integration as well as his relationship with the patrician-dominated politics of the Clark and Dilworth eras of Philadelphia politics.¹³ In reality, Clark spent much of his life working for and with some of the individuals responsible for the destruction of Catholic urban ethnic neighborhoods on political grounds veiled in the language of racism. In his historical writings he would point out such connections in nineteenth century Philadelphia but not in later periods. Doing so would have raised questions about his own actions as an activist.

Cities in Crisis was intended by Clark to be a clarion call for the Catholic Church to confront the problems of “modern urbanism” especially the problem of integration. Clark had lived under the ethnic parish model, but now advocated an integrated ecumenical model that Catholicism as a public institution could not fully embrace due to the still existing interethnic conflicts within the church. Monsignor Geno Baroni pointed this out more than any other author or activist.¹⁴ It would not be until Clark began to write about the Irish in Philadelphia that he would discover the naiveté of some of his arguments regarding integration, such as his expectation of Euro-American ethnics to potentially lose most of the value in their largest asset—their homes—for the sake of the possibility of an integrated society. Only then would he realize what was really being asked of Euro-American ethnics and that those doing the asking often never planned to live in the very neighborhoods they wanted to integrate. Worse yet many doing the asking wanted to integrate neighborhoods for political reasons disguised as social justice.¹⁵ In other words, Catholics in the minds of some Americans were becoming an electoral and cultural threat to the political hegemony that existed in American politics at the time. By 1960 the patrician culture that had governed Philadelphia for much of its history was dissipating and most of the patrician class itself had left for the suburbs. Those that remained had begun by the 1950s to realize that their days in power were numbered.¹⁶ To maintain their political

13. The anti-Catholicism of Joseph Clark was more circumspect, but Richardson Dilworth on more than one occasion let his prejudices be known regarding Catholicism and Euro-American ethnics. See S.A. Paolantonio, *Frank Rizzo: The Last Big Man in Big City America* (Philadelphia: Camino Books, 1993), 68 for just one example.

14. See Gene Halus, “Monsignor Geno Baroni and the Politics of Ethnicity, 1960-1984,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 133-159, and Larry O’Rourke, *Geno: The Life and Mission of Monsignor Geno Baroni* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

15. Perhaps those most guilty of this were the Quakers. Michael Novak touches upon this point in *The Rise of Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1971). While this is an admittedly bold assertion, it is so only because it is a component of Philadelphia politics that is poorly documented. See Eugene J. Halus, Jr., “At Frankford We Stand!: The Mobilization of Euro-American Ethnic Consciousness in Philadelphia Neighborhoods and Changes in City Government, 1950-1995,” Ph.D. dissertation (The Catholic University of America, 2002), which is one of the first attempts to document this phenomenon.

16. John Lukacs, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), 310-344 captures this point in a rather poignant way.

power and influence the political leaders of the patrician class in Philadelphia began to make efforts to assist the African-American community in Philadelphia as a way to check the political rise of the mainly Catholic Euro-American ethnic community. It was a political strategy of divide and conquer intended to weaken the position of urban ethnic Catholics and assure the patricians some influence in the African-American community and city government.

Dennis Clark and the Forces of Integration

Dennis Clark was torn by the question of integration. His training and education by both the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Jesuits imbued him with a sense that integration should have been a central goal for those Catholics concerned with issues of social justice. That was not a point shared by most of Philadelphia's Catholics, but the reasons for their beliefs had to do with more than just racism. This is not to assert that racism was not a factor, but it is intended here that racism be understood as one of a number of factors, and that the influence of the various factors alter the degree of their significance over time.

For many of Philadelphia's Euro-American ethnic Catholics their largest asset was their home. They depended upon the fact that over time the home would accrue in value and serve either as the basis of a nest egg for their retirement or as shelter for an extended family. For many, especially the Irish and Polish ethnics, home ownership was a relatively new phenomenon. Both groups had to varying degrees been excluded from owning land prior to coming to the United States.¹⁷ Hence home ownership was a source of great pride and a privilege to be defended strenuously. There was also the role of the neighborhood and ethnicity that needed to be taken into consideration. A mixed marriage in 1930s Philadelphia would have been an Irish Catholic marrying an Irish Catholic from another Philadelphia parish, and that sort of ethnic parish based solidarity persisted for quite some time in Philadelphia. By the 1960s Euro-American ethnics were crossing ethnic lines between Euro-American ethnic groups and intermarrying, but in some cases this was still treated with trepidation by some families. If Euro-American ethnics were skeptical of intermarriage between individuals of different ethnically European backgrounds, how easily would it have been for them to support desegregation? It would not have been easy, and in some ways it would have been unrealistic to have such expectations in the 1960s without giving these sorts of communities more of an opportunity to come to terms with the massive changes occurring throughout the nation. Clark at this time, however, believed that ethnicity was increasingly becoming less of a factor in American

17. See R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin, 1988) and Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1976) for details regarding the extensive efforts by the British to prohibit Irish Catholics from owning property and Caroline Golab, *Immigrant Destinations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977) that documents the great difficulties the Poles faced regarding property ownership in Poland.

society, and he in fact asserted that ethnicity and ethnic enclaves were in fact “dissolving.”¹⁸ Clark’s understanding of ethnicity was decidedly more simplified than in his later writings, and he did not seem to have much of an understanding of theories related to the formation and maintenance of ethnic groups. Nor did he seem to consider Will Herberg’s concept of a triple melting pot in his work *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* or Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s *Beyond the Melting Pot*, which would be published in 1963 a year after Clark’s *The Ghetto Game*. In fact for Clark ethnicity and religion seemed to be completely unrelated and unconnected.¹⁹

Clark also ignored the importance of ethnic institutions that obviously served as sources of social capital for various Euro-American ethnic groups who were themselves not fully accepted by the larger American society; desegregation would threaten the underlying communal and financial supports for such institutions and further explains the sometime opposition of Euro-American ethnics. The very institutions that defined who they were, the ways in which they interpreted reality were all in their minds under siege and were often disregarded in public debates about desegregation. These are all points that Clark, an impoverished Irish American from the Kensington section of Philadelphia, should have understood implicitly. Yet much of his early writing and his experiences working for the Catholic Interracial Council, the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations and the Philadelphia Housing Authority do not at any point take this sort of reality into consideration. He instead wrote and acted as if urban Catholics should simply accept desegregation and, if anything, grossly oversimplifies the challenges associated with such a goal. At one point in a quote he gave to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* he even referred to his fellow Euro-American ethnic Catholics as “jukes,” clearly indicating that in his mind, at least in the 1960s, they were somehow inferior.²⁰ In reality Clark struggled with his own ethnicity much of his life, and that struggle was frequently played out in rather public ways at times including the difficulties he had in relation to the question of integration. It is important to be precise here to be fair to Dennis Clark. Clark did not deny his Irishness. He embraced it. What he seems to have had great difficulty doing was integrating his Irishness and his Catholicism with some of his political beliefs, and this was reflected to varying degrees in his books, articles and diaries.

18. Dennis Clark, *The Ghetto Game: Racial Conflicts in the City* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 239.

19. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956) and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1963).

20. “Clark Plans No Role in Phillips Campaign; Will Battle Bossism,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 2, 1963, 8. “Jukes” was a negative slang term that emerges from the Social Darwinism and eugenics movement. The original citation for this article was discovered in E. Michael Jones, *The Slaughter of the Cities: Urban Renewal as Ethnic Cleansing* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004). It is a work that, I believe, possesses some profoundly difficult assertions that are at times oversimplified and inaccurate about Dennis Clark and some other matters, but Jones does deserve some credit for unearthing some previously unused sources and sometimes raising important questions that shed light on American Catholics and urban change.

Not only did Dennis Clark have great difficulty justifying the ways in which he portrayed Euro-American ethnics in his early writings, he also went through some rather extensive machinations to justify his choice of employers throughout much of his career. Clark very often worked for organizations and individuals that either implicitly were skeptical of Catholics or were sometimes outright prejudicial towards them. Clark attempted to ally himself with patrician Philadelphia, and was continually frustrated when he did not find himself fully accepted into that segment of Philadelphia society. In his personal diaries, but never in his public writings he would fume at times over the fact that he was not accepted and that he deserved better.²¹ When he did begin to write about the Irish in Philadelphia, he would sometimes have to hide this fact from employers or at least not emphasize it too explicitly, which only further complicated the challenges Clark faced between his competing desires to have the Catholic Church lead the charge against desegregation, his role as an historian, his ethnic consciousness, his activism within the Reform Movement in Philadelphia's Democratic Party, and his professional career spent working for the city's patricians.²² In fact during a time when Clark was questioning the worthiness of his affiliation with the Reform Movement, specifically Richardson Dilworth, and two years after he had published *The Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* he dedicated one of his other books to Dilworth.²³

Clark's transition away from Catholicism, integration and the Reform Movement was a slow and arduous process. By 1966 Clark's confidence in the church and in the possible success of integration were both waning, but it would not be until the 1980s that he fully gave up on the church and integration and then blamed the Catholic Church entirely for the failures of integration.²⁴ Yet in those same diaries, in 1963 no less, he would admit that he was glad to be out of the housing field and the advocating of integration.²⁵

Ethnicity and Politics

As Dennis Clark's commitment to the Roman Catholic Church began to wane he increasingly became nationalistic in relation to events in Ireland and deeply concerned with documenting the role of the Irish in America, especially in Philadelphia. Beginning

21. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, December 5, 1959, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

22. On December 24, 1985 Clark wrote in his *Diaries* of his desire to leave the Fels Foundation, a well established Jewish foundation, in order to work on a list of liberal causes. It is in comments such as these that one can find Clark riddled by the contradictions that are daily components of his life. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, December 24, 1985, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

23. Dennis Clark, editor, *Philadelphia: 1776-2076* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975).

24. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, September 16, 1968, August 27, 1983, February 10, 1991 and December 30, 1992, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

25. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, August, 4, 1963, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

with *The Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* through to his last book on Irish matters *Erin's Heirs: Irish Bonds of Community*, Clark circled back again and again to Irish experiences in Philadelphia often returning to the same subjects to offer more information or to make a point he felt was not sufficiently made in a previous work, but he also continued to break new ground and look at Philadelphia's Irish from new angles. Neither did he hesitate to write institutional histories if he thought they shed light upon the Irish, although these could at times be rather cloying more than they were actual history.²⁶ He also wrote about events in Northern Ireland and was openly nationalistic and supportive of the IRA's campaign during the Troubles, which some of Philadelphia's own Irish found deeply problematic.

Clark's writings on Philadelphia politics during this same time period stand in stark contrast to his writings about Philadelphia's Irish. While Clark's early writings about the Irish in Philadelphia document the strong anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment of nineteenth century Philadelphia and his later writings document some of those same prejudices in the twentieth century, he wrote about Philadelphia politics as if Irish ethnicity and Catholicism were not important issues.

Clark's growing dissatisfaction with the church and the questions of integration and neighborhood change drove the shift in Clark's thinking towards Irish ethnicity, but also made things difficult for him to reconcile with his list of patrician employers over the length of his career. Throughout much of his life Clark continued to work for organizations that professed openly or circumspectly either or both anti-Catholic or anti-ethnic sentiments, and writing some of the things he did must have stood in marked contrast with the ways in which he earned a regular paycheck. Clark's diary indicates that he was deeply troubled by all of this, but his anger at the Archdiocese of Philadelphia over the issue of race relations seems to have provided the basis in his mind for ignoring the efforts of such religious sects as the Quakers to intentionally desegregate Euro-American ethnic neighborhoods with little consideration of the real consequences for those ethnics, African-Americans or the City of Philadelphia as a whole.²⁷ Clark was so disgusted by what he perceived as the failure of the church to fulfill its public role as a propagator of social justice that he seems to have viewed the failures of other groups as somehow lesser than his own church's. He began to speak of ethnicity as a potential bridge to interracial cooperation, but was never able to

26. For example, Clark wrote institutional histories of two Irish organizations—the Donegal Association of Philadelphia and the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick—to document their roles in the Philadelphia area. Dennis Clark, *The Heart's Own People: A History of the Donegal Association of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Donegal Association of Philadelphia, 1988) and *A History of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland to Philadelphia, 1951-1981* (Philadelphia: Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, 1981).

27. Compare Clark on the question of the Quakers and their problematic role in Philadelphia politics with E. Digby Baltzell, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), originally published in 1979, pages 102-103 specifically. Baltzell the Philadelphia patrician sees the challenges Quakerism poses to Philadelphia politics and society more clearly than does Dennis Clark. In his diaries Clark discounts Baltzell's writings about Philadelphia. See Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, June 12, 1984, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

acknowledge the framework from which at least part of those ideas emerged. It may in fact not be too strong a claim to say that Clark pursued the issue of Irish ethnicity not only because he saw it as a potential bridge towards interracial cooperation, but also to flee the failures of integration and his efforts in relation to it.²⁸ Because of his continued transition away from the church he was never able to develop a coherent worldview that acknowledged his intellectual and ethical indebtedness to Catholic thought in terms of the way he viewed both questions of social justice, especially as they relate to issues of integration, and Irish ethnicity and its place in American history. In both his diaries and his published writings Clark was unable to articulate any sort of coherent understanding of ethnicity. Ethnicity for Clark was an almost primordial thing, considerably more abstract than even Michael Novak's conception of ethnicity in which he openly uses terms such as primordial to define ethnicity.²⁹ In effect the various contradictory components of Clark's mind began to evidence themselves quite clearly. He looked upon figures such as Frank Rizzo and James Tate and made comments about them that involved both praise and condescension. There was part of Clark that viewed both men as models of what ethnic leaders should be, but then just as quickly he would criticize them for being limited by their ethnicity.³⁰ Clark would make these tremendous mental swings that at one moment declared ethnicity to be something of the past or that ethnics were now assimilated. Then just as quickly he would assert that ethnicity is a primordial force, a universal form of understanding, and would even go so far as to assert that it is part of nature. However, when Clark asserted ethnicity to be a universal form of understanding, it immediately brought forth the question of how Clark might then justify the destruction of ethnic neighborhoods as he did in the 1960s. If ethnicity was in fact a natural force, what group did Clark belong to? What about former Mayor Dilworth? Clark, of course, does not point this sort of question out and does not even hint at a possible answer. Doing so would have forced him to face the often contradictory nature of his thought.

Conclusion

By the 1980s, because Clark was largely unable to resolve the contradictions in his thought, he withdrew from many of the issues that had engaged his early life. It must have been a difficult time for him. He had begun as a Catholic activist set upon resolving problems related to social justice, especially desegregation, only to discover that not only was he unsuccessful in achieving desegregation but that many of his professional efforts were associated with policies that in fact decimated and per-

28. Richard Juliani, Department of Sociology, Villanova University was helpful in finding the language to encapsulate the way in which Dennis Clark might have viewed these matters.

29. Michael Novak, *The Rise of Unmeltable Ethnics: The New Political Force of the Seventies* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

30. Those who knew Dennis Clark publicly will in all probability find this particular assertion difficult to accept but Clark did at times privately write of Frank Rizzo in a positive light. See Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, July 18, 1991, Box 19, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

manently transformed Philadelphia neighborhoods. As these contradictory feelings grew within Clark, he increasingly began avoid the issues that had so engaged him from the 1950s into the 1970s.

The psychological dissonance for Clark must have been profound, even tragic. Clark came from a family that had suffered for being both Catholic and Irish in both Ireland and in the United States. His family had been deeply affected by the Great Depression and poverty. At one point as a youth his father was out of work for eighteen months, and Clark's family was so impoverished that they lived in ten different rental properties between Clark's third and twelfth birthdays. According to Clark they at times moved without notice in order to beat the rent because they could not pay, and the Clark family was on at least one occasion forcibly evicted from their apartment.³¹ He considered entering the priesthood, was a devoted Catholic who attended mass almost daily for a period of his life, apparently did not use birth control, read in the Catholic intellectual tradition, and saw himself as being deeply Irish. He was in other words almost the walking stereotype of an Irish male. Yet, over time with his commitment to integration and his desire to be accepted by the leaders of the Reform Movement—Philadelphia patricians—he would blame the church for all of the failures of integration and drift away from the church. He increasingly directed his children away from Catholicism and sent them to the Quaker school Abington Friends in Montgomery County just outside the City of Philadelphia, while all the while encouraging them to be strong Irish nationalists as he increasingly supplanted Irish nationalism as the faith that would replace the Catholicism that defined so much of his personhood.³² Yet he bemoaned these very things as well, especially their effect upon his children.³³ His criticism of the church was so visceral at times that all of his children largely strayed from the Catholic tradition, and his youngest daughter, Brigid, before her death in a tragic car accident, even considered becoming an Orthodox Jew.³⁴ Clark was crestfallen by this. He acknowledged in his diaries that he had been responsible for driving his children away from the Catholic tradition and that he did not know Brigid's "inner life."³⁵ He went so far as to say that he had not had a deep con-

31. Dennis Clark, *Autobiography*, Box 18, MSS 177, II.

32. Dennis Clark became so nationalistic in relation to the question of Northern Ireland that he taught some of his children during potty training to refer to their urine and fecal matter as "Cromwell" and "Thatcher" respectively. He also regaled in the IRA assassination of Lord "Dicky" Mountbatten. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, August 26, 1979, Box 18, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

33. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, July 8, 1964, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

34. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, February 7, 1992, Box 19, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Clark had received news of his daughter's death on February 2, 1992. Further proof of the family's distance from the Catholic Church is found in the fact that Brigid's memorial service, while presided over by Archdiocese of Philadelphia priest John McNamee, was held in a Unitarian Church. Clark does not give any sense of what the service consisted of besides the fact that some of Brigid's family and friends eulogized her. It was during one of these eulogies that Clark heard about his daughter's explorations of Orthodox Judaism.

35. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, April 23, 1992, Box 19, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

versation with his daughter for some time. At end he provided a rather sad picture of his family life and his sense that he had failed to offer his children the sort of guidance and firm hand that he believed was necessary. In his mind he had let them stray from their faith and had not pushed them to achieve. Brigid was the only one of his children up to his death to apparently show any interest in intellectual life and writing. The others, according to Clark, did not even express much of interest in attending college let alone scholarship.

Dennis Clark would also bind himself to the Reform Movement of Joseph Clark, Richardson Dilworth and the Americans for Democratic Action even as he had severe doubts about them. It must have been especially difficult for an Irish American such as Clark to subvert himself to a predominantly English and Protestant patrician class, and to every day have to reconcile his job with what seemed to be his more honest feelings of Irish nationalism. That ate away at him almost daily, which can be observed throughout his diaries over the course of the decades in which he kept them. By the early 1980s Clark described himself as “an incoherent, socialist, anarchist, democrat.”³⁶ It is a clear sign of Clark’s own mindset and his inability to create a coherent view of the world.

Clark appeared to have in his private thoughts considered himself to have been a tremendous failure, and he was in part correct. Yet, in spite of his complex personality and contradictory frames of mind, Clark did do something unprecedented. He began a process of historically documenting the Irish experience in Philadelphia, and still stands as the primary scholar on that subject. At times his work can be problematic due to disputes over historical interpretation or the veracity of certain facts, but he gave both Philadelphia and the field of Irish studies and church history a foundation upon which to build. That is undisputed. Some of the walls of that foundation may not always be level and may suffer from tilt at certain points, but the house still stands. It just lists a bit. Justice and mercy compel us to take what good we can out of Dennis Clark, and his books about the Irish are certainly still worth exploring. They leave us with something to further build upon, and the house can be built considerably higher if future scholars build upon the foundation Clark established. Like Geno Baroni, Dennis Clark believed that race relations in America would only improve if ethnic groups first understood themselves. As deeply conflicted as Clark may have been at times his hope was that his writings and work might in some way play a part in overcoming the problem of race within the church and the larger American society. For that he should be admired and read, but we must also acknowledge that he was in many ways the living embodiment of the cultural, ethnic, religious and political contradictions of America that emerged out of the 1960s.

36. Dennis Clark, *Diaries*, January 16, 1982, Box 20, Roll 330-1 microfilm, Dennis Clark Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.