Bishops, Wives and Children: Spiritual Capital across the Generations, Douglas J. Davies and Mathew Guest, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007 (ISBN-13: 978-0-7546-5485-8), xi + 197 pp., Hb $99.95

Reviewed by Chilton R. Knudsen
Bishop of Maine

I opened this book with curiosity and skepticism. The subject matter – the kind of people who are bishops and the lives they lead as both public and private figures – is one of universal curiosity in the Anglican Communion. This curiosity takes many forms from one part of Anglicanism to another, but is expressive of an inchoate sense that

> [W]ithin Anglicanism, the very notion of episcopacy is still in the process of formulation and development. It is, in fact, one key arena within which images and ideals of the notion of 'church' and 'orthodoxy' are worked out. (p. 19)

My skepticism was rooted in the fact that I am a Bishop in The Episcopal Church (TEC), having served for over a decade as diocesan Bishop of Maine, in a nonestablished church in an overtly pluralistic religious culture. I am a woman, attentive to the fact that bishops in Great Britain have been and still are exclusively male, with female spouses and generally traditional family structures. I exercise episcopal ministry in TEC, which has consecrated women to the episcopate since 1989 and in 2003 consecrated to the episcopate V. Gene Robinson, Bishop of New Hampshire, an openly gay man living with his male partner.

Most of my episcopal peers in the USA do not live in official residences ('palaces' is the term used in this book). Although thinly populated (approximately 1.5 million) the Diocese of Maine is geographically larger at 35,307 square miles than all of Scotland (30,415 square miles). Bishops in TEC are elected by the people they serve, rather than appointed, or (in the case of suffragans) chosen by the diocesan bishops with whom they will serve.

My beginning sense was of the great differences between the circumstances studied and reported in this book compared with the everyday reality in which I serve. My question, as I began to review this report, was twofold: how is this report useful to those who live within the social and ecclesiastical context studied? And, how might this study be useful in clarifying the circumstances of my own (rather different) context? From this standpoint of skepticism, I came away significantly impressed at the methodology of the study and the careful scholarship evident in this book, which is the report on that study.

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The authors, who directed the research, employed familiar sociological tools (surveys, interviews, interpretation of data). This report utilizes helpful avenues for the presentation and interpretation of the findings: empirical data (accessibly summarized in tables), case studies, identification of historical trends in the period examined (1940–2000), reflection upon and interpretation of the data, and examination of the themes emergent in the study using sociological/anthropological concepts such as spiritual capital, value transmission, gift-theory and symbolic exchange. The early chapters of the book examine the evolving understandings of bishops' roles, the cultural changes (both within the church and in the society at large) within the studied period, and the multiple distinctions between diocesan bishops and suffragan bishops. Final chapters consider the specific issues of clergy wives, the clergy household, and clergy children all as the larger context in which the wives, households, and children of bishops are examined. The core focus of the research concerns the familial and generational dynamics through which spiritual capital is accumulated, enlarged and transmitted both within the church and to the larger sociocultural reality, with bishops and their families being the particular microcosm of this larger question.

I think of this report as a snapshot (or perhaps a video) of an era, a retrospective view captured at a threshold moment in the Anglican Communion. To be sure (as the authors assert), the period of 1940–2000 was itself a time of significant change. The current period in which we live and read this report is a season of even more dramatic ecclesiastical shifts and tensions, many of which turn on the very question of a bishop's ministry: who is fit (by whatever yardstick fitness is measured) to exercise episcopal ministry? How does the bishop (and the bishop's family) function within the cultural context? In what ways does a bishop (and a bishop's household) offer a countercultural witness? At threshold moments, a reverent examination of the past is a helpful prelude to evaluating and reflecting upon current and future directions in church and in society. All social reality – and most of us would affirm that the church both participates in and transcends social realities – is historically grounded. Thus, this study and this book which reports upon it are well worth our serious examination in a season of serious tension within the ecclesiastical home of which we are citizens.

This book identifies throughout its pages various tensions seen in the exercise of episcopal ministry. Not shrinking from the tensions it identifies, this report describes them without any apparent impetus to resolve or reduce those tensions (bravo!). Here those tensions are described in all their confounding complexity: the public life/private life tension, the challenges of altruism within a highly pragmatic institutional setting, the power inherent in the office of a bishop (especially

so in an established church) set against the essential humility of the bishop himself vis a vis his public 'footprint', the challenge of autonomy and self-differentiation within a constellation of expectations and pressures to conform, and what this book terms Transactional Leadership set over against Transformational Leadership.

Another slice into the Transactional vs. Transformational Leadership paradox, clearly related, is the terminology of asceticism (mastery) and resignation (mystery). This section of the book is provocative and compelling. As a bishop, I am aware of how mystery and mastery are sometimes intertwined and other times in painful competition in the exercise of my episcopal vocation. I also find helpful the evolutionary direction described within the section on the historical evolution of a bishop's ministry in the recent era: from prince to prelate to pastor-manager (the terminology here given follows the authors' references to Trevor Beeson's important 2002 report, The Bishops).

There are a number of other helpful concepts in this book, and I want to acknowledge them directly and boldly. One is the tension, in the exercise of our episcopal ministry, between our fear of failure and rejection, and our fear of arrogant ambition and what that ambition might do to us, to the self at its core (p. 83). In my experience, bishops with whom honest conversation is possible acknowledge that we serve (and indeed were called, through whatever form that 'calling' takes) as both authority figure and servant. In this book, which honors the symbolic dimensions of a bishop's ministry, the episcopal ring and the pastoral staff (the crozier) are seen as representative symbols of this twin dynamic: we are both authority figures and shepherds (p. 62). Since reading this book, I do not carry my crozier or put my ring on each morning without pausing to take an inner account of the complexity of my ministry as a bishop.

Another helpful concept, familiar but refreshed by the insights this book presents, is that of boundaries. What are the boundaries which we constantly negotiate as bishops? How do we maintain a healthy domestic life which is responsible to the family unit and also to the demands of the ministry of bishop? This book, by its reporting of a range of bishop-family circumstances, enlarges our view of the norms. Room *can* be made for the unique (and sometimes unsettling – to parents as well as to the larger church community) journey of our children into their own spiritual path; our family unit need not be held totally captive to the expectations of others, our dwelling place (be it palace or private home with mortgage coupons to prove it) need not be seen as 100% public space, our families may find their greatest fulfillment in serving as active partners in our ministry although for some of their ministry will be expressed along other paths, perhaps not within the institutional church at all. Our children may be comfortable with and proud of our public role and visibility; for some of our children, the public aspect

of episcopal ministry will be a burden which is carried in a wide range of ways.

> In theoretical terms, a personal spiritual quest was triggered as a counter-response to his clerical upbringing, but advanced by the spiritual capital acquired through that very context. (p. 145)

Thus does life in a bishop's household present a unique challenge, while simultaneously offering unique grace and blessing by which that challenge can be engaged.

Readers of this book may also find other concepts herein expressed to be provocative and/or helpful. I found especially helpful that treatment of 'nearness' over against 'distance' articulated by the authors (p. 139) as inherent in clergy families at large but set in high relief in the life of a bishop. Also useful for me has been the principle of 'embodiment', applied specifically to bishops as the embodiment of the church's essence:

> The church is not, however, simply a kind of technical memory storage system . . . but one that is embodied in designated persons most especially its bishops. (p. 178)

Further, the concept of 'vagueness' as an element in episcopal ministry, prompts me to recognize (and give thanks for) the growing realization that I need not have it all pinned down, regarding all subjects and at every turn. The life of faith is a developmental process, and being vague need not mean being in doubt about all things. Being vague is, to my thinking, related to humility and hospitality: humility to affirm that one flawed human being's perspective is both powerful and incomplete . . . and hospitality rooted in the recognition that bishops – and indeed all of us – are especially mindful of oversight responsibility for the whole church, not only for those who presently constitute the church but those who are yet outside its doors, hungering for Good News.

Every piece of good research invites further research. As we look at this work, further questions building on their research come to mind for future consideration:

- What about bishops' spouses who are men? Although we have at the moment a relatively small sample size, it would be wise for us to begin framing the questions for this population.
- How does our church, which mediates its values (at least in part) generationally and through its bishops, helpfully engage the discussion about mission and ministry in a season of rapid and contentious change?
- If the families of bishops serve as an important vehicle for the transmission of spiritual capital across generations, in what way might

new visions of 'family' for bishops serve in the same process of transmission?

We owe the authors, Douglas Davies and Mathew Guest, our gratitude for this report on their research about bishops and their families. While the scope of this research report is focused and time-rooted, there are themes here identified which can be applied to every context and circumstance. One of the holy tasks of the church, both now and always, is to engage in the classical spiritual practice of self-examination. Books like this one assist us in that holy work.

Response to Chilton R. Knudsen

By Douglas J. Davies and Mathew Guest
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At the outset we are glad that Bishop Knudsen's review appreciates one of our prime research goals of describing the complexity of life, in this case the ecclesial, social and family lives of bishops, their wives, and children in the Established Church of England during the latter half of the twentieth century. More than that, as a church leader, she sees opportunities for theological advantage and personal self-understanding in an engagement with social scientific analyses. Experience shows that, despite the great effort involved in social surveys, social analyses easily attract the 'So what!' response from theologians, one that stifles further discussion. We are, therefore, appreciative of the quite different 'So what?' response evident in Chilton Knudsen's review as she clearly recognizes how some answers prompt deeper questions and a self-reflection upon life and work informed by an enlarged perspective. When she speaks of the traditional Christian practice of self-examination she acknowledges that social scientific interpretations of religious aspects of life may help inform it. When saying, for example, that she no longer wears her Episcopal ring or carries her crozier without 'pausing to take an inner account' of her ministry she highlights one of our prime theoretical intentions of exploring the notions of embodiment and transmission of values. These terms, 'embodiment' and 'values', reflect something of the integration of anthropological and sociological traditions underlying our work which has sought far more than the presentation of statistical tables from which some abstraction may be drawn. Indeed, we were and are alert to many theological issues and pastoral-congregational concerns to which they may be fruitfully related.[1] Bishop Knudsen's response,

[1] Mathew Guest, for example, jointly edited with Karin Tusting and Linda Woodhead, *Congregational Studies in the UK* (2004), Aldershot: Ashgate.

then, expresses a positive conversation between social scientific research and Christian ministry. Because a great deal of academic knowledge easily becomes compartmentalized we have sought to relate certain social scientific theoretical concepts as much as possible so as to benefit from their mutual influence, often with an awareness of potential theological bridging-points. A key area for this was in taking the largely sociological interest in various kinds of social or cultural capital and developing that into the notion of spiritual capital and then relating this to the largely anthropological concern with gift or reciprocity theory. On that basis we view bishops as not only deposits of, but also shapers of, spiritual capital, a capital that has a kind of inalienable dimension capable of being expressed as a cultural 'gift' of faith within the Christian tradition which is also available for the benefit of wider society.

Also in terms of our approach there are, in particular, two interlinked points of Knudsen's review that prompt some comment. First, where she implies that our study is a 'reverent examination of the past', and second, that our report is 'without any apparent impetus to resolve or reduce' the tensions it describes. We certainly had no intention of being particularly 'reverent' nor, indeed, of seeking to offer any formula for conflict resolution, precisely because we wanted to see what life was like for these bishops, wives, and their children. This dual task of looking and seeing is of paramount importance to social scientific studies of religion and is not easy. The everyday fact of looking demands care when elevated to anthropological observation and transformation into a 'seeing' under the influence of various theoretical perspectives, for there are many potential dangers in trying to foist some sociological idea upon people by pressing information beyond its natural shape. What makes this review valuable to us, and much the same could be said for the former Archbishop of York, John Habgood's review in the *Church Times*, who spoke of seeing things 'afresh through the eyes of sociologists',[2] is that it does not seek for 'sound-bite' research findings or 'results' but appreciates the cumulative effect of descriptive interpretation. For social scientists to impose themselves upon people's lives and those of their families is potentially upsetting, especially when religious issues are involved. The same thing could be said as far as bishops are concerned, and indeed the wives of each group. We can only be grateful for the good grace of those who agreed to take part in our study, for their cooperation extended beyond kindness and hospitality, and into a serious engagement with the issues that arose during our interviews. In this sense, while we do not pretend to offer any solutions to internal conflicts within the Church of England,

[2] Habgood, John, 'Witness of Wives and Sucklings – Review of *Bishops, Wives and Children: Spiritual Capital across the Generations*', *The Church Times*, September 14, 2007.

we hope that our social scientific analysis may furnish clerics, their partners, and children with a broader perspective from which to negotiate the vicissitudes of the institution that so profoundly shapes their lives. In keeping with the aims of this journal, we also hope that the conversations fostered by this research – both among church leaders and their families and between church leaders and their vocations – will continue as a valuable dimension of a public theology.

An important aspect of Knudsen's review lies precisely in that she writes from a contemporary American Episcopalian context whereas our book was specifically about English bishops between 1940 and 2000. The American context offers the advantage of cultural comparison, often a fundamental aspect of anthropological study. Certainly, she identifies 'the familial and generational dynamics' of the transmission of spiritual capital as our prime concern and sees the importance of this in any cultural context. It would, however, also be interesting to see how aspects of the formation of spiritual capital might differ between England and America. We are thinking, in particular, of the influence of Cambridge and Oxford Universities and Theological Colleges, of private schools, the armed forces, and the persistent social class system for this generation of English bishops compared with the USA. This final factor is of particular interest, especially in relation to the 'bias to the poor' initiative which brought urban poverty to the forefront of the Church of England's mission during the 1980s, and shaped a key dimension of Christian identity for a generation of clerics. In this respect the social capital drawn from upper middle class backgrounds acquired, in Robert Putnam's terms, a 'bridging' function,[3] allowing bishops to embody their identities *via* ministries to the underprivileged, as well as equipping them with the means to challenge what they saw as the social injustices brought about by the then Conservative British Government. However, the Thatcherite regime appears to have furnished this initiative with a powerful plausibility structure, and as this gave way to a less ruthless conservatism and then to New Labour, alongside the more conventionally evangelical priorities of Archbishop Carey, 'bias to the poor' appears to have faded into the background, no longer a key identity marker for British clerics operating within a postindustrial context. We mention this here in order to highlight the contrast with the rhetoric of the American Episcopal Church, whose commitment to human rights issues has apparently been far more enduring, perhaps in part because the affirmative individualism of the 1960s has become more effectively embedded in American culture, its resonance made clear in both the reactionary campaigns of conservatives and the more humanitarian foci of the liberal or mainline

[3] Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, London: Simon and Schuster, pp. 22–24.

churches. Here we see plainly how shifting social contexts shape the cultural landscape faced by the church, as well as the options available to the church in reacting to it.

At a time when tensions throughout the Anglican Communion, particularly over issues of sexuality, illuminate the points where national and sometimes denominational boundaries are subservient to transnational theological allegiances, an understanding of how churches function as culture-bound institutions achieves fresh relevance. As we write, the 2008 Lambeth Conference is fast approaching, but while it is serving its usual function as the decennial gathering of the global Anglican Communion, this year it promises to illuminate more than anything else points of disharmony and disunity as dissenting voices plan to boycott the conference and deploy the event as a platform for particular agendas. The key players here are well known, both in the church and to some degree in the wider society, and this is in no small part a consequence of the church existing within a global media-driven age. Indeed, the bishops we studied comprised the first Episcopal generation required to manage their ministry in dialogue with a mass popular media, and many commented on how challenging this had been. Whatever we may make of these new challenges, and many are understandably cynical about the mass media, there is a clear sociological point to be made here, one that the church would do well to take on board, viz., that within a media age, given to sensationalism, controversy, sentiment, and celebrity, institutions are often presented through individuals reckoned to embody them. Arguably, 'the church' as an abstracted but coherent entity in the mind of the person on the street has given way to a series of jarring images associated with a collection of prominent individuals. The power of the media is such that this mode of engagement has made its way into the internal life of the churches themselves. Within such an environment, a study of prominent clerics inevitably taps into processes that have a much wider relevance, from public perceptions of authority to the church's own experience of negotiating internal conflict, not to mention the role the families of leaders assume in the expression, embodiment, and wider transmission of their power and identity. In this respect, a comparison of the UK and USA might reveal points of similarity rather than difference, and future studies might look to how the mass media constitutes a major arena for the negotiation of Anglican identity in the twenty-first century.

Against the dramatically public world of the media there are other, much more private, scenes that could be compared in the USA and UK. We wonder, for example, about the importance of what we called the spiritual 'aside', informal yet pin-pointed comments from a senior to a younger person that catalyses or helps them crystallize their sense of vocation at critical life-moments. How might the size of each church affect such potential encounters? Then, almost belonging to the same

family of concepts, there is the issue of 'vagueness', picked up in the review. This 'vagueness factor', as we called it, emerged through the data and was entirely unanticipated. Though we did consider issues of religious identity in relation to the very English idea of 'churchmanship' and the way it may have changed during the twentieth century, and we did trace how these changed over the lifetime of individuals, we also came to see a positive function inherent in a kind of 'vagueness' that described a sense of vocation devoid of imperious party claims. It was, then, interesting to see Knudsen interpret 'vagueness' in relation to faith as 'a developmental process' and then to see her extend it into the topics of humility and hospitality. This raises a deeply significant point of method in the study of religion, viz., that, when one studies and writes of communities that are able to read and engage with the research, further development is possible among all concerned. Studies influence those they study and responses affect the original scholars. This fact of academic life is tremendously important and reminds us that the narrower issue of 'ethical' concern over research is, really, part of a much wider responsibility we all possess as thinkers and writers.

Finally, we would like to offer some brief reflections on the areas of future research that Knudsen identifies as potentially arising from our book. First, what of bishop's spouses who are men? Of course, this is not yet a British phenomenon, and a recent report commissioned to review the practical steps required to introduce women bishops into the Church of England recommends a process that, even assuming a smooth and expeditious transition, would not see the first female consecrated until 2014. On this timescale, we could be waiting another 15 years or so before sufficient numbers are in place for such a study. This is one of many cases that illustrate the intergenerational complexity of the Church of England, as well as its peculiar view of its collective identity. According to our survey results, over 71% of retired Church of England bishops would support (50% would 'strongly support') the consecration of female bishops, and yet the current leadership appears intent on treading a cautious and conciliatory line. It is difficult to say whether younger generations currently in leadership have adopted a more conservative perspective, whether lay votes in Synod are blocking a progressive voice among the clergy, or whether a traditionalist minority are being placated as a strategy of avoiding conflict or schism.

Whichever explanation is most persuasive, studies of bishops' husbands are unlikely to appear in the UK in the immediate future. Here, colleagues elsewhere might take the lead, and we welcome Knudsen's enthusiasm that this issue be addressed in the imminent future within the American Episcopal Church. Of particular interest will be the manner in which the professional and religious status of husbands frames perceptions of their Episcopal wives. Can we expect the embedded patriarchal imbalances of wider society to be uncritically reflected

in the church, or will this relatively new configuration of professional roles open up new ways of constructing conjugal identities? Moreover, bearing in mind our analysis of spiritual capital, if the husband has a high status job and professional skills, is it legitimate or desirable that these be translated into an opportunity to enhance the church's influence and social capital? Or, in terms of reciprocity theory, would husbands be willing to see their Episcopal wives as 'gifts' to the church or to the world at large? Or, again, might TEC have to wrestle with that dilemma, which presses harder in times of decline and disillusionment, of choosing between the benefits that come with associating with professional groups, and the need to uphold its liberal tradition of empowering women quite apart from their husband's position?

These questions draw in two final areas of enquiry identified by Knudsen: how bishops and their families might contribute to ministry and mission in a time of change, and what difference new forms of family among bishops might make to this process? Such issues highlight the importance of viewing Christian institutions within the broader matrix of social life, not just in terms of a theological encounter between the church and the world, but as thoroughly social phenomena, the norms of which are in continuous conversation with their wider context. This conversation may be ignored, cut off, manipulated or elevated into heated debate, but it cannot be denied and should probably not be avoided.

Finally, and in terms of the history of a project, it may interest readers to know that this 'Clergy and British Society 1940–2000 Project', funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, actually began life as an idea concerning anticlericalism, with the research question of why England in this period did not seem to possess anticlericalism. The hypothesis was that it was because the dominant Church of England possessed a married clergy with children acting as buffer zone between the church and the public. This question soon seemed too great to deal with in terms of the research funding available while, concurrently, the vitally prior issue emerged of just what we did know about clerical marriage and its relation to society in Britain. Indeed, we were slightly amazed that so little British research had been conducted on a spectrum of professionals over issues of families and recruitment. We realized that we knew very little indeed and this prompted our change in focus. Our work brought us much pleasure in meeting many families and in appreciating something of the lives of some very well-known and some relatively unknown men spent in the service of church and world in many diverse ways. Behind them we also found dedicated wives who anchored a family that gave their husbands a certain validity as church leaders and mothered children whose social engagement regularly reflected the values of their family of origin even if their own religious profile diverged from that of their father.