

**Comments of the Honorees of the  
20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the  
Institute for American Values**

**June 18, 2009**

**New York City**

*Don Browning is the Alexander Campbell Professor Emeritus of Ethics and Social Science at the University of Chicago's Divinity School. An ordained minister, devoted teacher and indefatigable scholar, Professor Browning has produced numerous books over four decades, winning an international reputation for seminal works in practical theology, religious ethics and the philosophy of science. As Director of Lilly Endowment's Religion, Culture and Family Project, he brought the insights of religion and ethics to bear on the "culture wars" debate over the family. This collective scholarly enterprise inspired a rich body of critical thought on the postmodern family in the United States and across the world that is unparalleled in its scope and originality. His intellectual leadership is matched by his ethical passion for justice and equality and by his generosity to all who seek to learn from him.*

**Comments**

I am deeply honored to receive the Arthur E. and Joann Rasmussen Silver Book Award for Intellectual Leadership from the Institute for American Values, an organization I have been associated with almost from its beginning. I have so much respect for the Institute and especially its brilliant president, David Blankenhorn. There is little doubt that the success of the Institute is due largely to David's ability to grasp a salient issue, attract major scholars to address it, organize and lead their research, and effectively disseminate its findings to public policy organizations, the government, and the general public.

Since so many important scholars have contributed to the work of the Institute, one wonders how it decided which ones to honor first. Of course, as the years pass, David and the Board will find other ways to recognize the many gifted people who have offered so much to the clarification of American values on the family, the role of civil society, thrift, and Islam/West relations – the major issues that the Institute has addressed over the two decades of its life.

It was in early 1990 that I first made contact with David Blankenhorn and the Institute. In the autumn of 1989, I had been teaching on the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Carol and I returned to Chicago and began preparing for a nine-month research period at the Center for Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, just an hour's drive from New York. In the stack of mail I collected upon returning home, I found a communication from a new organization called the Institute for American Values. Although I was rushed for time between these two trips, I placed this newsletter on the lamp table beside my bed and read it cover to cover before falling to sleep. I liked what I read and vowed to arrange a meeting when I got to Princeton with this man David Blankenhorn in New York

City.

I soon set up this appointment. I assumed by the seriousness of the Institute's newsletter and persuasiveness of David Blankenhorn's own articles in it that I was on my way to meet a man in his mid-fifties. After all, he was the head of a New York think-tank; one has to be mature and well established, I thought, to rise to such heights.

When we met, I was surprised to encounter a young man in his early thirties. Although he had at that time his own modest office, he confided that only a few months earlier he had nothing more than a desk in another organization's space. This desk, however, provided him with a prominent Broadway address in New York City, the business and news capital of the world. He believed, and correctly, that this was an important source of legitimation for a fledgling think-tank with lofty ambitions to communicate important ideas to the opinion shapers of our society.

When it came time for lunch, David took me to a local greasy-spoon café that served tasty soups in its cramped quarters. As I returned to Princeton, I found myself impressed by how a very young organization with a very young president was already attracting top scholars to think and write such mature thoughts about families and other issues pertaining to American values. Not too many months later, David invited me to take part in a research project and also become a member of his Board. I was delighted to accept both of these assignments, and I have been happy with this association ever since.

The key to the success of the Institute is the genius of David Blankenhorn. Few individuals have his combination of fund-raising and administrative skills combined with the academic talent for attracting and choosing top scholars to address well-defined and salient social issues. In his academic leadership role, David often functions like a seasoned Ph.D. dissertation advisor in helping scholars define and pursue the questions that they are to address.

And then there are his skills in dissemination. This is where the Institute has really been unique. I know of no comparable think-tank or research group that has been as successful in communicating its findings and messages as the Institute for American Values. Experiencing this success is very energizing to scholars who are accustomed to seeing their work accumulate dust on musty shelves in little-used libraries.

The Institute is fully aware that, as successful as it has been, it should do even better in communicating its research and message. Not only in the field of marriage and family, but on issues pertaining to civil society, child socialization, thrift, and more recently Islamic/West relations, it has had stunning success in comparison to similar organizations. David Blankenhorn – a small town Mississippi boy – has been truly exemplary in his management of the big media outlets of a highly complex society.

It has been a genuine pleasure for me to contribute to some of the reports of the Institute and wake up the day after their release and read about them in the leading newspapers of the country and possibly hear about them on morning television programs. That does not happen

to scholars very often who sometimes must wait months, if not years, for reviews of their work to appear in obscure and seldom-read journals. The Institute has been a leader in bridging the distance between scholarship and the world of public and popular discourse.

It has been a great pleasure to be associated with it over the years and a high honor to receive this recognition tonight.

*Jean Bethke Elshtain is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago's Divinity School. Professor Elshtain is prodigiously accomplished as a political philosopher, with a body of work on religion, politics, and international relations that includes an outstanding number of books, essays, and endowed lectureships. Widely recognized as one of America's most influential public intellectuals, Professor Elshtain's thought has extended beyond the academy. Public servant as well as public intellectual, Professor Elshtain has given generously of talent and time, serving on President Bush's Commission on Bioethics, on the Board for the National Endowment for Democracy, and as the holder of the Maguire Chair in Ethics at the Library of Congress. A witty and trenchant critic, she has contributed to journals of civic life and opinion on both the right and the left. In all her work, she consistently brings a morally serious and fearlessly independent perspective to bear on some of the most serious and contentious issues in contemporary public life.*

## Comments

It is indeed an honor to be recognized on this occasion. I accept with the caveat that all credit where the Institute and its extraordinary accomplishments are concerned comes to rest in the capacious lap of David Blankenhorn.

Some twenty years ago now, I encountered an impossibly young Blankenhorn at a conference being held in a hotel or motel in the general vicinity of Rockford, Illinois. David and I were among the voices of moderation and the party of common sense on that occasion, or so I like to remember it. We believed that the American family was in big trouble and that a troubled family scene made for an increasingly fragile American civil society overall. But we did not share the gloomy view of many of our fellow conferees that American society had fallen into a pit of darkness from which it was unlikely ever to emerge.

The evening prior to the conference's closing session, David asked if he could have a moment or two with me—perhaps over coffee before the concluding event and before we each headed home the next day. “Sure,” I said, never for a moment discerning that I was being primed to make a life-long commitment.

The next morning David told he was in the process of setting up an Institute—an independent effort—to focus on the family and related issues. Would I be interested in being kept in the loop? “Sure,” I said, and the rest, as they say, is history: so many memories, so many meetings, so many conferences, so many Councils, so many rich reports to the nation.

The Institute's track record over the years—for a small outfit operating on a shoe-string budget—is nothing short of remarkable. Astonishing, really. David's indefatigable energy, his sense of the key issues, and his keen desire that we 'happy few', veterans here gathered, should have a voice in the public square—this made all the difference. I am delighted to have been a fellow laborer in the vineyard through it all.

We are older now, hopefully wiser, and well aware that time waits for no man—or woman—so, as we look ahead, we are also aware of the need to bring in younger folks and to 'institutionalize' the Institute in myriad ways. Yet it is also vital to keep alive the freshness, the energy, indeed the audacity, of the founding generation, especially David. No easy task. But we are well on our way.

Where do we go from here? The Institute does certain things extremely well: we have the track record to prove it and we should continue in the by now well paved pathways of success. The heart and soul of the Institute remains the 'family question' broadly construed, a question that radiates out in so many directions, all of which have to do, finally, with what kind of home, at once personal and civic, we live in.

Is it a decent, well-ordered place where human beings can flourish? Or are children—too many children—undermined by family disintegration or by not being born into an intact family in the first place? To the extent that we lose our way because so many American children have lost theirs, to that extent we are a less generous, less ennobling, less stable civic home for human development and formation.

Because we cherish our civic domicile, we must look as well at external sources of strife and conflict—hence, our focus on international civil society under the rubric of a Muslim/West dialogue, our Malta Forum. We have made a good start and forged enduring connections as the means toward deepened mutual understanding.

The work of the Institute for two decades has reminded us, time and time again, of the ways we can come to know a good in common that we cannot know alone and, further, that when our private lives fall apart, our public life suffers. This lesson is easily forgotten and we are all the poor when that happens.

It is the Institute's task to keep reminding us of the fundamental first things: we are the proverbial canary in the coal mine chirping out warnings less disaster strike. Long may that canary called the Institute for American Values chirp away!

*Norval D. Glenn is the Ashbel Smith Professor in Sociology and Stiles Professor in American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Over more than four decades, and in well over one hundred journal articles, book chapters, and monographs, Norval D. Glenn's research has probed such topics as the social and demographic correlates of marital success in the United States; geographic patterns of divorce; the culture of courtship on college campuses; the effects of divorce on the religious identities of young people; and trends in scholarship on family change. A past editor of the Journal of Family Issues and member of numerous editorial boards, Professor Glenn is a member of the Research Advisory Groups for both the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative and the Texas Healthy Marriage Initiative, and has consistently sought to bring the best scholarship to bear on the public debate on marriage in America.*

## **Comments**

A crucial turning point in my career came in 1989. During the few years prior to then I had gradually become convinced on the basis of research findings that, contrary to what I had once thought, some recent changes in the family in the United States and other modern societies were reason for serious concern. Therefore, I responded with interest when I received a phone call from David Blankenhorn to invite me to attend a conference at Stanford University dealing with the extent to which recent family change should be a reason for concern. Although I had never been an avid conference attender, I agreed to participate as a discussant of one or more of the papers to be presented.

The conference turned out to be the most interesting and stimulating one I had ever attended, by a considerable margin. There I got to know David; met Jean Elshtain; and became better acquainted with Dave Popenoe, whom I had met earlier. This was the beginning of a long and very gratifying relationship with the Institute for American Values (IAV). I had reached the point in my career at which I longed to do something other than write for academic journals and to do something that would have a real world impact, and being asked to participate in projects sponsored by the IAV gave me an opportunity to do that. The result has been that the most gratifying work of my career has been during the past twenty years.

Through my involvement with the IAV I have come to realize just how poorly the results of academic research are usually communicated to policymakers and the general public and how important organizations such as the IAV are in facilitating that communication. Among the many other things I've learned from the Institute is that many of the smartest people around are not members of the academy, that dealing with journalists and media people doesn't have to be unpleasant, and that New York City is indeed a nice place to visit. And through my association with the Institute, I have made many wonderful friends. It has been a great ride.

Thank you David for that phone call twenty years ago. And thank all you other IAV stalwarts present on this occasion for helping make my work with the Institute such a great experience. And thank you who selected me to be an honoree at this event. The stature of the other honorees makes me feel honored to an extraordinary degree.

*His Excellency Sheikh **Abdullah al-Salimi** is the Minister of Religious Affairs & Endowments of the Sultanate of Oman. H.E. Sheikh Abdullah is a vocal supporter for the place of reason in the religious tradition. He has edited the seminal opus in jurisprudence authored by his grandfather Nur al-Din Abdullah al-Salimi, a major reference shaping the legal framework of Oman and beyond. A determined supporter of tolerance and dialogue, H.E. Sheikh al-Salimi has steered his Ministry toward assuming an active role in inter-civilizational communication. The Scholars Exchange program between the Institute for American Values and the Sultanate of Oman is the direct product of his vision. His Excellency has provided the Institute for American Values with generosity, hospitality, and sponsorship that embody the nobility of the mission of mutual understanding in which he is engaged.*

## **Comments**

I had hoped to be able to attend this occasion as I have known my friend Prof. David Blankenhorn and his family for many years. Prof. Blankenhorn and his eminent colleagues have visited Oman in the past, and I have had the pleasure of also being able to travel to the USA to visit him, his family and his colleagues. I gave a lecture at the Institute for American Values during my visit four years ago, so our relationship has not been restricted to individuals but is a cooperation and solidarity in matters pertaining to shared values and responsibilities at religious and human levels. We have also enjoyed consultation and cooperation in working together to improve Omani-American and, indeed, Arab-American relations.

Unfortunately I cannot attend this occasion due to prior official commitments so I have asked Prof. Abdulrahman Al Salmi to deliver this speech on my behalf. I would, firstly, like to express my great appreciation to the Institute for American Values and its work, as well as its President, Prof. David Blankenhorn.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the serious work carried out by the Institute in preserving Islamic values, particularly those pertaining to the family as this is a very important issue, not only at social and ethical levels, but also at the level of human relationships, which are based on common merits and responsibilities. This particular issue represents an area of great joint cooperation between us.

I have mentioned repeatedly in my lectures and talks with Prof. Blankenhorn, and other prominent professors such as Prof. [James Turner ] Johnson, Prof. [John] Kelsay and Prof. [Peter] Skerry, that the introduction of common values between Abraham faiths and other religions and cultures, is a vital introduction into initiating beneficial relationships, which are dynamic and strong and start with a mutual recognition that the Holy *Qur'an* calls “cooperation”. This cooperation then develops into what the *Qur'an* describes as achieving the virtues that depend upon a deep mutual understanding of human capabilities and a strong will to accomplish unity among humankind on the basis of principles of mind, justice and ethics, despite differences in cultures and backgrounds.

The third area for which I would like to express my appreciation to the Institute is that of American-Arab relations, which have experienced some very tough times and overcome many hurdles. I well remember that the Institute’s first endeavour in this area was an important

statement that was issued [on] ... Just War ["What We're Fighting For: A Letter from America"]. I was not, in fact, supportive of a lot of what was said, yet I understood the deep wound that the American people felt as a result of Al Qaeda's attacks on them. I also felt the strength of will on the part of the signatories in statements that called for the establishment of good and proper relations with Arabs and Muslims. I also became aware, through Abdulrahman Al Salmi and Prof. Ridwan Al Sayed, of the idea of the Malta Forum, which formed thanks to the endeavours of David and his colleagues, and which provided an opportunity to open a window to penetrate the wall of misunderstanding between the two sides, especially at an intellectual level. It is my hope, in view of such improvements, that work will continue within the Forum and that its activities will increase while widening the understanding of both sides — the Arabs and the Americans.

Also ... [the use of] art has [been] a part of our relationship when Raina [ Sacks Blankenhorn] developed a project illustrating photos about religion and society in Oman through American eyes. These photos were taken by New York photographer Edward Grazda, ... [and] the photos have [been] presented in several official occasions.

I thank you sincerely for the invitation to attend and I hope you will accept my apologies for my absence. I send my heartfelt felicitations to the Institute for American Values on the occasion of its 20th Anniversary. We will always cherish the memory of the Institute and its staff for their major concerns about the family and ethical values, and to the very important continuation of building and improving Abraham's faiths and American-Arab relations. Thank You.

*Ridwan al-Sayed is a Professor of Islamic Studies at Lebanese University in Beirut, Lebanon. Professor al-Sayed is a graduate of both al-Azhar, the foremost center of Islamic learning worldwide in Cairo, and of Tübingen University in Germany. Dr. al-Sayed has served as an effective bridge for civilizational understanding in the Middle East. He is tireless in his critique of extremism and intolerance in modern Arab and Islamic thought, culture and politics. A prolific writer, and a mentor to a generation of scholars, Dr. al-Sayed has persistently called for a confident Islam to accept the evolving modernity of the global age. Dr. al-Sayed was editor for the influential Arabic journal al-Ijtihad. He is a pivotal figure in the efforts of the Institute for American Values to build a sound basis for sustained engagement with the Muslim world.*

## **Comments**

I would like first to express my regrets for not being able to attend, because of official engagements between the 15th and the 25th of June, which I was unable to reschedule. It was my strong desire to be present for the great appreciation that I have for the Institute for American Values [IAV] in general, and for its efforts to improve Arab-American relations over the past catastrophic years.

My acquaintance with the IAV dates back to the year 2000 when some of its family-focused publications reached me. I was to get to know much more about its activities when my friend Hassan Mneimneh organized a meeting for me in 2002 with IAV President David Blankenhorn

in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while I was a Visiting Professor at Harvard University. David was considering getting engaged in another impossible task, having completed his ushering of the well-known “What We are Fighting For” statement. His new impossible task was to organize a meeting between Arab and US intellectuals to discuss issues of discord and to clarify concepts. He conceded that there were difficulties at his end with his US colleagues, as experienced in his effort to draft and gather signatures for the statement on Just War ["What We're Fighting For"]. He also indicated that he appreciated the difficulties entailed by gathering Arab intellectuals to meet with their US counterparts, given the circumstances of that time.

I considered the project and worked towards its execution, in support of the effort of David Blankenhorn, Hassan Mneimneh, and their colleagues. The Malta Forum thus emerged, and we have had three productive meetings. David’s determination will carry the Forum further, together with the plan to publish a journal of Arab-US relations.

At my end, after the meeting with David, I devoted one issue of the academic journal, *Ijtihad*, of which I was the editor, to the “What We’re Fighting For” statement, translating it to Arabic, distributing the translation to approximately 50 intellectuals—20 of whom responded with their reactions—and publishing 11 of these pieces. The respondents included intellectuals from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, and the Arabian Peninsula. I later invited many of them to join the Malta Forum, while David and his colleagues selected the US participants. The first meeting presented difficulties. It centered on two main controversial themes, Just War, or the US wars and their justifications [as viewed from the Arab side], and the question of Palestine. It did however end well, and laid the grounds for the next meetings in Casablanca and Spain. To appreciate the efforts made by David Blankenhorn, Hassan Mneimneh, and their colleagues, I would like to underline the following points:

1. The participants from both sides were established scholars, many with numerous books and articles on the subjects covered by the three meetings. The Arab participants came from different regions of the Arab world (with the exception of Egypt and Iraq where it has been difficult to recruit participants for various reasons). It is important here to underline the courage of those participants who came from Syria. One of them, our friend Turki al-Rabio has sadly passed away since, while another, Dr. Michel Kilo, has spent almost four years in prison for his human rights activism and his call for sound relations between Syria and Lebanon. Gladly, he was released one month ago.
2. After the second meeting in Casablanca, David, Hassan, and myself felt that the experience needs to be raised to a new level. David expressed his conviction that continuity, renewal, and impact are enhanced by the publication of a cultural and political journal of Arab-US focus.
3. The reduction of tensions between the USA and the Arab world, starting with the year 2006, may have caused some laxness on the Arab side. Thus, I did note that Arab support for the idea of the journal was not on par with the need for it, since no journal is devoted to US-Arab affairs in an Arab marketplace awash with publications! It is therefore important to support the idea of the journal, while continuing the Malta Forum in new incarnations.

4. Deep in my heart, and through conversations with my Arab colleagues, I know well that among the main factors of success in what we have accomplished is David's personality, his ethics, and his modesty. Many of my Arab colleagues have indicated to me that David inspires trust in them. Many have asked me for IAV publications, and for David's latest book, even though they were not Malta Forum participants.

So, on the basis of my relatively long acquaintance with the Institute for American values and its President; in recognition of the serious work that the IAV has dedicated to family values and general policies, as well as to US-Arab relations; and out of the friendship that I hold for David and all the colleagues that I have met over our three previous meetings; I would like to congratulate the Institute for American Values on its 20th anniversary, and to wish the continuation of the rich experience of the past two decades.

I do feel that Arab-US relations have improved, and that the crisis between Islam and the West is dissipating. I hope that, God willing, we will witness a better future for humankind and for Arab-American relations.

*Judith Wallerstein is a clinical psychologist and researcher whose groundbreaking three-decade investigation into the effects of divorce on children revolutionized the scholarly consensus, informed judicial decision-making and changed the public debate. Dr. Wallerstein's seminal work, which includes Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce; Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade after Divorce, and the best-selling Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A Twenty-Five Year Landmark Study, brought impeccable research and insightful analysis to bear on the previously neglected topic of children experiencing parental divorce. Lucidly and sensitively written, her books have reached a wide popular audience as well. A fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation Study Center in Bellagio, Italy and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavior Sciences in Stanford, California, Dr. Wallerstein is widely considered the world's foremost authority on parental divorce and a fierce and tender advocate on behalf of voiceless and vulnerable children. She is the founder of the Judith Wallerstein Center for the Family in Transition.*

## **Comments**

Dr. Wallerstein spoke extemporaneously. She told the story of how David Blankenhorn had recruited her in the early 1990s while she was testifying at a Senate subcommittee in Washington, D.C. David called her and asked to meet with her the next morning. She accepted his invitation and remarked humorously that she thought nothing of his call since she was used to speaking to strange men.

Dr. Wallerstein described how David had been a courageous leader in the early 90s in inviting a group of "divas" to make up the membership of the Institute. These "divas" were people from different parts of the country; in leadership positions; from different disciplines; and in diverse fields who were not used to having their central thinking challenged. Their ensuing discussions about the family certainly did not start with the same assumptions and although they were civil,

they also differed. She noted David's ability to forge a group that worked together successfully, wrote broad policy statements, and developed close respectful relationships with each other that held over many years—a great tribute to his leadership, his integrity, and his steadfast commitment to the values that brought them together in the first place.

David's greatest talent, she concluded, is his ability to welcome each individual's contribution as unique and important. This is a rare gift and one that Dr. Wallerstein admires the most. Along with thanks to the Institute and the Institute's Board of Director's for the award, she thanked David for a memorable chapter in her life.

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