

The Humanitas Prize

I speak today in the name of the executive committee of The Human Family Institute, in the name of John Furia, Jim Moser, Arthur Hiller and Bob Lecky, as well as in my own name.

What we have to announce today is our response to a question we consider central to American Civilization at the present time, a question, I'm sure, all of you have asked yourselves many times.

Can the new media of mass communications, especially TV, serve the cause of man? Can it improve the quality of his life? Can it help him grow, develop and become more fully human?

To these questions, without qualification, we answer "Yes". We believe TV can help man toward the fulfillment of his destiny. We believe TV can expand human consciousness, giving him an experience of the world in which he lives, an experience of his brother human beings, and most important of all, an experience of himself, of what it means to be human, of the meaning of his life on this earth.

We believe TV can also be a liberating, freeing influence. How? By illumining our options. By challenging us to take charge of our own lives and humanize the world in which we live. By motivating us to reach out in love to our brother human beings.

This brings me to the third great contribution TV can make to our lives. I think it can do much to unify the human family. It can give us an understanding of and an appreciation for our brothers and sisters in the human family, especially for those who are very different from ourselves in culture, race, life-style, political loyalties and religious beliefs. Regardless of our differences, we are brothers of one another. We find it very easy to forget that. TV can give us an experience of our common brotherhood that will be a little harder to forget.

TV can expand human consciousness. It can deepen human freedom. It can help unify the human family. But is it? Is American TV fulfilling its potential? Is it helping man become more fully human?

For all of us, I think, the answer to these questions would be a "Yes" and a "No". To some extent, American TV is contributing to man's humanization. To some extent, it is failing to do so. With programs like The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman, Judgment, The Execution of Private Slovak, certain episodes of The Waltons and All in the Family, American TV is fulfilling its potential. It is helping man to be more human. But with too many other programs, just the opposite is the case. The senses are titillated. The conscious mind is massaged. But the deeper reaches of the human personality are almost completely ignored. There certainly is a place on TV for pure entertainment. But programming which is distractionist, which helps man run from the more painful aspects of reality, programming which projects a totally materialistic view of human life, and which treats the viewer not as a person with whom one communicates, but as a consumer who has value only because he can buy what you're selling is not contributing to man's humanization. Such programs alienate man. They make him less human. And all of us are poorer as a result.

So what do we do about this situation? How do we encourage the kind of programming which expands human consciousness, deepens human freedom and unifies the human family, the kind of programming, in short, that has a humanizing effect upon its audience, rather than the opposite.

This is a question we have wrestled with for years. Our answer is what we announce today—the Humanitas Prize.

For the writer of the hour and a half or two hour special or movie of the week, which most fully projects human values and brings the insights of the Judaic-Christian vision of man to bear on our contemporary situation, we will be giving a prize of \$25,000.00.

To the writer of the best one hour show, we will be giving a prize of \$15,000.00.

To the writer of the best one half hour show, we will be giving a prize of \$10,000.00.

We have selected the writer, not because we don't appreciate the contribution of the producer, director, actors, and craftsmen in the production of a humanizing program, but because we are convinced that the humanizing impact of a show begins with the script.

To carry off this project, we have established a new entity—The Human Family Institute—which is separate from any existing organization now operating in the entertainment community, and which is separate from any of our respective production companies. It is in process of being incorporated as a non-profit, non-sectarian educational and cultural organization.

I might say that the Humanitas Prize is the result of years of discussion between John Furia, Arthur Hiller, Jim Moser and me as we have worked together on Insight. But I must also say that the idea crystallized and took shape only as a result of a discussion we had with Charles Williams, the Vice President of the Lilly Endowment. I proposed the idea to him. He responded with enthusiasm. He sold it to the Endowment's Board of Directors. Without Charles' vision and the resources of the Lilly Endowment, we would not be able to do what we are doing today.

With the Humanitas Prize, we are trying to encourage humanizing programming. We think the prize will be good for our industry. We know it will not solve all our industry's problems. Any more than it will solve all the country's.

But we take solace from that old and familiar Chinese proverb, "it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

The Humanitas Prize is the candle we have lighted. We hope it will cast some light into the shadows of man's confusion. We hope it will ignite some sparks of hope and freedom. Most of all, we hope it will kindle fires of love and compassion. If the programming inspired by this prize helps our fellow countrymen understand each other a bit better, if it leads them to a deeper experience of their common humanity, if it motivates them to reach out in love to each other, we will feel we have succeeded.

It is in this spirit and with this hope that we announce to you today the Humanitas Prize.