

President, Human Family Institute

Remarks, Humanitas Luncheon

We have heard a great deal in recent weeks about the harm that Television does—that it can desensitize the viewers of TV violence to the horrors of real life violence, that it can arouse the aggressive and violent impulses that lie dormant in every human heart, that it can create the impression that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict, that the individual has the right to bypass the law and inflict pain on other human beings, that at the deepest level, human life is arbitrary, hostile and cruel, and other people are the enemy, that, as a consequence, human life is warfare and only the violent survive.

But we have heard very little about the good that TV can do—how it can take us into the morally bankrupt, spiritually empty psyche of the initiators of violence, and give us some experience of the fear, isolation, self-hatred, despair and cowardice which most often afflict these people. There is nothing heroic, healthy or happy about the perpetrators of violence.

Well used, Television can show us honestly the effects of violence on the victims—the pain they feel, the degradation they experience—on the victims’ families, which are sometimes much worse—and on the perpetrators of the violence—most often they emerge from the experience dehumanized, drained of dignity—and it can show us the effects of violence on society. Violence spawns more violence. The result is a crescendoing spiral of violence. Here in Los Angeles we know about that.

And Television can show us the courage of those who dare to break this tragic cycle, who have the moral stamina to confront abuse with kindness, hatred with love, who choose to meet physical force with soul force, to endure suffering rather than inflict it, to put flowers into the barrels of the guns of their oppressors.

Television can illumine the necessity—and the rigors—of non violent conflict resolution. Talking things through, affirming our adversaries, appealing to the best in them, seeking the truth through honest dialogue, even if that should demand we change our position, seeking justice for the adversary as well as for ourselves, even if that should require we cut back on our demands.

Does non violence work? Of course. Look at the American civil rights movement. Look at Solidarity in Poland, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Peoples’ Power in the Philippines. But you don’t need to do that. You’ve seen non violence work again and again in your own life.

Is non-violence easy? No way. It requires courage. It requires trust in the truth and in the basic goodness of even the most debased human being. And it requires a kind of spiritual depth and moral richness that is found only in the fulfilled person.

The Humanitas Prize is built on the premise that TV has a significant contribution to make to the growth and fulfillment of its viewers. It exists to encourage the creative community to tap into the media’s humanizing potential, and harness its capacity for audience enrichment.

Four years ago, from this podium I announced a ten year program to expand the impact of the Humanitas Prize by expanding its educational programs, increasing the number of its prizes, and if possible their size, to enable them to keep pace with inflation. To do this, the Board decided to seek the help of the industry, to expand our endowment.

We are now in the midst of this process. We used to run three afternoon seminars a year on human values and entertainment writing to WGA members. With Greg Apparcel moderating, we are now running nine all day Master Writers' workshops each year on the same subject. Average attendance is 75. In addition, last year we ran workshops on human values for the programming staffs of NBC, CBS, and ABC. This year we are doing so for the creative personnel of the major studios. Last Thursday we did one for Paramount. In August we will do so for Warners and Tristar.

In 1990, we announced a new \$25,000 prize for cable and PBS programming which we will give for the third time today.

And today, I am pleased to announce a new \$25,000 Humanitas prize for the writer of the feature film that does the most to enrich and fulfill its viewers. Some exceptional feature films are being made. We think these writers need the encouragement and deserve the recognition that the Humanitas prize gives.

All of which is to say, the Humanitas idea is working. The Humanitas movement is moving onward and upward.

Thank you very much.