

Must-flee TV

by Cal_Thomas

There are events in most of our lives that offer opportunities for us to change our ways. The strike by television writers affords one such opportunity. By its very nature, television is mostly illusion. During the golden age of television (that would be the '50s and '60s), real audiences laughed (or didn't laugh) at comedy shows, which were mostly live. If you weren't funny, you didn't get laughs. But most shows were genuinely funny and devoid of bad language. The FCC had more influence then and there were only three television networks. Today, a laugh track laughs for you, whether or not anything is funny and most "comedy" is full of sexual innuendo. On cable, there is no innuendo. The f-word is used like a bludgeon. Female "scientists" on the crime shows display enough cleavage that if the commercial were for Victoria's Secret, viewers wouldn't notice the transition. Such fantasies don't resemble any female scientist I know, nor would a professional woman dress like a hooker for the office. It's not much better in the news division, especially on cable, where female anchors and reporters resemble Barbie doll cutouts. They mostly look alike: big hair; big lips; big . well, you get the idea. The Website Radar (www.radaronline.com) recently had a quiz that asked people to distinguish between a list of female anchors and porn stars. I scored seven out of 10 correct. That's because I recognized the anchors, not the porn stars, though the two are increasingly difficult to tell apart. Entertainment scripts are formulaic: plenty of murders, bad language, sex, explosions and gallons of blood and gore. Even when they're not "re-runs," the plots are mostly re-runs. So is the news. On broadcast TV, Bush is evil, the Iraq war is wrong, higher taxes and bigger government are good, Democrats are righteous and Republicans are sinners. On cable - depending on the channel - Republicans are good and Democrats are bad, or the reverse. Guests scream at each other and question the other's patriotism. There are stories about missing women, murdered women, missing children, and various lowlifes who, were it not for TV, would be wallowing in deserved obscurity. Rather than watch re-runs (new or old), now would be a good time to consider turning off the TV and returning to those thrilling days of yesteryear, before the Lone Ranger, even before TV. That's when families scheduled dinner together and talked about the day's events and developments in the world. Useful information was passed from adult to child and back. Before TV, more people read books. They also read newspapers and there were more of them to read. Readers talked with others about what they had read. Good stories by good writers transported readers to other worlds, giving them vicarious experiences that made them feel good, offering hope and laughter. Recently on PBS, I stumbled upon the 22-year-old made-for-television film, "Anne of Green Gables." It was one of the most pleasant TV experiences I have had in a long time. It is a redemptive and lovely film, wonderfully written, beautifully shot and splendidly cast. It left me with a good feeling, in contrast to much of what is on most TV stations, which usually makes one with any taste, education or class want to take a bath. "Anne" was an oasis in a "vast wasteland," to recall what FCC Commissioner Newton Minow said about television 46 years ago. Television was once viewed as a welcome guest in the home. Programmers were to behave as any guest, not soiling the carpet or breaking furniture, controlling their children and demonstrating sensibilities that would not offend their hosts. No more. Today's television programs behave like uninvited guests who stay too long, eat all the food, drink too much and throw up on the new rug. Most people could live without TV if they tried. The Writers Guild strike gives them that chance. Take a walk with your daughter. Have a conversation with your wife, your husband. Eat dinner together as a family without the distraction of the television set. Read a book and immerse yourself in fictional characters or real history. Instead of being spoon-fed irrelevancies and meaningless chatter, exercise your mind. You will quickly form new, more pleasant habits that will leave you with better feelings than does TV's corrupt fare from which more of us should flee. (Direct all MAIL for Cal Thomas to: 2225 Kenmore Ave., Suite 114, Buffalo, N.Y. 14207. Readers may also contact Thomas by e-mail. (c) 2007 Tribune Media Services, Inc.