

# Ethics and the search for an AIDS cure

**Bernice P. Jackson**



There's been a quiet uproar in the medical community in the past few weeks as it has become public that the federal government has financed a medical study using third world women who are pregnant and who have HIV/AIDS. Doctors already know that when pregnant women receive the drug AZT that their babies are more likely to be free from the virus. But, in this study, some of the women are given a shortened course of the expensive AZT, while others are given a placebo, or dummy pill.

The women from Africa, Thailand and the Dominican Republic, were asked if they wished to participate in the study and the terms of the experiment were also explained to them, that is, that they may receive the drug or they may receive a placebo. However, a recent New York Times reporter interviewed some of the women participating in the testing program and found that for many, the concept of a scientific test in which some get medication and others get a dummy pill is not understood. One woman told of having the test explained to her within an hour of finding out she carries the AIDS virus and that it may be transmitted to her unborn child. Another, more educated woman indicated that she never understood that it was already known that AZT prevents the transmission of the virus during pregnancy. When

asked if she found out she had received a placebo when a proven treatment already exists, she replied, "I would say quite simply that it is an injustice."

The testing is necessary, we are told, to see if there is a less expensive way to treat the growing number of people in developing countries with HIV/AIDS which cannot afford the expensive and complicated AZT regimen. The controversy has erupted, largely in the medical community so far, around the ethics of treating some women with a drug known to help, while giving others the dummy pills, perhaps dooming the untreated women and their children to die. And then there is a question of the ethics of doing a study which would not be allowed here in the U.S. in third world countries.

While U.S. government officials argue that because these developing countries cannot afford the high-cost AZT drug for their patients, this testing is the only option that makes sense. And some African public health officials say that because of the price of the drugs, their only alternative to the testing is to do nothing. But when asked by a reporter if she realized that these tests could not be done in the U.S., the head of the testing program in the Ivory Coast asked, "If the country that is paying for the study cannot accept conducting it, then we can't be expected to accept it either."

The fact that these drug trials are being done in third world countries inevitably raises questions about government tests using the poor and people of color. Even the New England Journal of Medicine has compared this new study to the infamous Tuskegee experiments done by the federal government on poor, uneducated black men who were never told that they

were not being treated for syphilis and who never were offered treatment even after penicillin had been proven to be effective. In the latest twist in this new case, several members of the New England Journal of Medicine editorial board resigned after the editorial appeared, saying they had never been consulted about the article and that they did not agree with it.

Whether a comparison with the Tuskegee experiment is fair or accurate or not, there are some real moral and ethical questions which must be answered. Is it ethical to do a test elsewhere which we could not do in our own country? Is it ethical to do complex testing using poor, mostly uneducated people who have few or no other options for treatment? Can we absolutely discount the element of race in all of this? Is it fair to ask women to participate in such a study only minutes after learning they have this deadly disease and that most likely their unborn children will have it as well?

But in the articles being written by medical ethicists and others, no where have I yet seen the question being raised about the ethics of charging thousands of dollars for medicine which we know save lives. Indeed, HIV/AIDS patients in the U.S. spend \$12-15,000 annually for these drugs. Pharmaceutical companies argue that they must be able to recoup the high cost of research. But where does responsibility to their profit line end and responsibility to millions of poor people who are destined to die without the drugs begin? What is the ethics of only the rich of the world having access to these life-saving drugs? That to me is the real moral and ethical dilemma.

**BERNICE POWELL JACKSON** is executive director of the Commission for Racial Justice in Cleveland.

## Letters to the Post One God with many names

When my family and I moved to Charlotte three weeks ago, we were rather unpleasantly "greeted" with ignorant, hate-filled rantings from a born-again bigot (S.C. school board member) named Henry Jordan. This misguided individual seems fanatically eager to pick fights with Muslims. Well, Mr. Jordan, I'm your man.

Obviously Jordan is woefully ignorant, not only of Al-Islam, but of his own Scriptures. He publicly castigated my Brother-in-Faith David Sanders, invoking "...the God of the Bible, Jehovah, not Allah...". In fact Allah is "the God of the Bible." Al-Lah (Allahumma) in Arabic and Aramaic, El-Lah (Elohim) in Hebrew, and Hotheos in Greek all refer to The God of Abraham (alaihissalaam).

God is known by many Names. The Blessed Qur'an gives us 99 As'maa-ul Hus'naa, Most Beautiful Names (or Attributes) for God, and admonishes us to call Him by them. Some of these Names—for example Ar-Rahim, "The Most Merciful"—occur in the Bible as well.

However, "Jehovah" is not found in those Scriptures from which the Bible was translated. It's a seventeenth-century Christian fabrication based on a mix reading of the Hebrew consonants YHWH.

When Hadhrat Jesus preached the Gospel, he didn't speak Greek, English or German—he spoke his own language, and that of his people. That language was Aramaic. Mr. Jordan is therefore asked "How does one say 'God' in Aramaic?" Answer: "Allah."

The point is, we Muslims have worshipped The God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus (alaihissalaam) for nearly 15 centuries (without, I might add, any instruction from Christians). Since Mr. Jordan seems to have appointed for himself a "god" other than The One to Whom Jesus (alaihissalaam) prayed, I conclude by asking him what "god" he serves, because his own Scriptures clearly state:

"Look unto Me and by ye saved, all the ends of the earth: For I am God, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:22)

*Al-Hajj Bilal Ammar Jihad  
Charlotte*

## Leake election is a positive first step

Word of the election of Vilma Leake to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board was music to my ear.

A multitude of congratulations to Mrs. Leake and the voters of Charlotte who elected her. Having closely followed the events surrounding Mr. Kenneth Simmons and the West Charlotte issue(s), the election of Mrs. Leake is significant in many ways; not the least of which is that her election will provide a member unafraid to challenge the consensus mentality, take a position, speak and address issues.

"If you can control what a man thinks, you need not worry about what he will do". To my knowledge, the defeat of school board member Sam Reid is a timely and fitting end to a triumvirate; a threesome (of "men") who supported the cowardly ambush and cowardly treatment of Kenneth A. Simmons, former principal of West Charlotte High School. I wonder what the threesome was thinking. I hope voters continue to keep watchful eyes on the remaining members of the school board, document cowardice and misrepresentation at every opportunity and especially at the ballot box. "Those who stand for nothing will fall for anything."

I take this opportunity to also congratulate Kenneth A. Simmons for taking a stand; for obtaining and maintaining respect, consequences, political gain, popularity or to pandering to a certain group of people for fleeting status.

*Brenda Hogue Springs  
Detroit*

# Equality is not reserved for white males exclusively

By Julianne Malveaux  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

I can't walk into an all-white-male room without my stomach lurching.

We supposedly live in a diverse and pluralistic society, one in which African Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, Native Americans and whites should fully and equally participate in the making of policy and decisions. To walk into an all-white-male room is to be reminded of the ways that scarce resources like power and decision-making have been concentrated in white male hands.

It is a rejection of the world as we know it, a movement back in time to the world that existed before the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, back to the day when privilege was white and power was male —

before affirmative action.

When thousands of Californians joined the Rev. Jesse Jackson at the end of August in crossing the Golden Gate Bridge to protest the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209, they offered testimony to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream. Further, they challenged the notion that King might have embraced the so-called "race neutral" ballot initiative that would prevent state and local governments from providing full participation to all citizens in California's economic and political life.

The photograph of Jackson thronged by Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds made it clear that many Californians understand the street adage that "if you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything." Slightly more than half of voting Californians, caught

between economic fear and the distorted notion of "preference," fell for a ballot initiative intended to turn the clock back to the day when jobs were advertised by gender and when state and local contacting went only to white men. But there were no all-white-male spaces on the bridge last week. Instead there were people who understand the richness of King's language, who understand that when he talked about his "dream," it included diversity.

King said: "America owes a debt of justice which it has only begun to pay. If it loses the will to finish or slackens in its determination, history will recall its crimes and the country that would be great will lack the most indispensable element of greatness—justice." King also noted: "When we ask Negroes to abide by the law, let us also declare that the white e-lal dues not abide by

the law.... He violates laws on equal employment and education." Were it not for violations in equal-employment laws, there might not be policies like affirmative action.

"There is another myth that still gets around; it is a kind of over-reliance on the bootstrap philosophy.... They say the Negro must lift himself up by his own bootstraps. They never stop to realize that no other ethnic group has been a slave on American soil. The people who say this never stop to realize that the nation made the black man's color a stigma; but beyond this they never stop to realize the debt that they owe a people who were kept in slavery 244 years."

This is King — not a reparations advocate, not a rabid liberal — speaking at his last Sunday morning sermon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

Those who quote King for speaking of character content must also quote him for reminding the nation of a debt yet unpaid.

Many of those who have embraced the notion of the unpaid debt marched across the Golden Gate Bridge with Jackson. But those who proclaim the playing field is level don't feel their stomachs lurch when they walk into an all-white room. Instead, they feel at home, considering themselves so superior by virtue of the color of their skin that they can lecture about test scores and educational remediation. This is not only a rejection of King's dream. It is also a 21st century tragedy.

*JULIANNE MALVEAUX is a Washington, D.C., based economist and nationally syndicated columnist with the King Features Syndicate.*

# CBS discriminates against 'Angel' based on age

By Della Reese  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER  
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

After three years of some rather difficult shooting days of the series "Touched By An Angel," I decided that it was time to make working conditions part of my negotiation before the fourth season started.

Most of the conditions that I addressed affected the entire cast, and, of course, the crew. They were:

- Too many 14 and 16 hour work days. Considering that we were going into our senior year of production, it was paramount that the conditions suffered through the last three years, be corrected. Namely, poor scheduling, late script changes, were causing us to work as if this was a show in its first year of production. We could forgive emergencies causing this, but that was seldom the case.

- Too many unnecessary early calls. We could be called to the set and wait for hours in our trailers, before we worked. Again better scheduling would correct that.

- Because I'm a minister in Los Angeles, I needed to leave Salt Lake City, every Friday night at 10 p.m., in order to prepare my sermon for Sunday. I didn't care how early I had to go to work on Friday, just complete my day so I could catch the last flight. I further requested that I be allowed to return to Salt Lake City on Monday morning at 9.30 a.m. This gave me my weekend to prepare my sermon and take care of my church's business.

(Since I had fallen in February while being picked up to go to the set, and needed to have one hour of massage therapy each day for three weeks (only), the filming schedules were quickly changed to accommodate this. This showed me they could, with prop-

er scheduling, end some of the excessive hours we had worked.) Taking these points into the negotiations with CBS, we quickly came to an agreement, noting that only under dire circumstances would we have long hours.

It was also agreed that as I had been contracted to write my autobiography by G.P. Putman & Sons, that I would be allowed to do a brief book tour of one week. This accommodation is usually given other stars writing books, though quite often they would have two weeks. Though working conditions were my primary concern in that meeting, it was stated by my agents, and understood by CBS, that if Roma Downey (my co-star) received a raise, then just like the last two years I would be expecting the same percentage raise. Roma received her deserved raise after a very difficult fight, which was so surprising, since we had helped to make "Touched By An Angel" CBS's most popular and powerful drama in television's Top 10.

However, when my agents started discussing my equal raise, they were told that since I had received better working conditions, that I would only be given the normal "bump" of 5 percent. With persistence, my agents were able to get CBS up to only 12.5 percent. I was shocked. Because of the ever-growing success of the show, every year we re-negotiated our salaries, I was given the same percentage raise as my co-star, but now I was being penalized because I wanted to be treated with more consideration. I sent a letter to Mr. Les Moonves, president of CBS Entertainment, telling him of my surprise at CBS's offer, and would he give more consideration of my value to our show. He didn't respond to me directly, but to my

agents, saying that he was surprised that I got any raise at all.

So on Monday, Oct. 6, (a day that I was given off because they had asked me to come to work earlier than usual the Monday before) I called a press conference at my church office. I discussed the issues, that my co-stars (Roma and John Dye) had received a 100 percent and 30 percent raise respectively, while mine was far below that. I was then informed that CBS was now offering a 25 percent raise, still below both co-stars, and not matching the usual percentage that Roma received. It seems to me that I'm being doubly discriminated again: First because I fought for better working conditions, and secondly, as I'm the senior member of our cast, I must not have the same value in the network's plans to attract more 18-49 year-old viewers.

My only recourse is to present this to the media and the viewing audiences. What has been CBS's response to the media? They consider the 25 percent raise a 'substantial raise.' My response? 'Compared to what?'

CBS said they had reduced my hours to make it better for my ministry. Now let's "talk about the real" of that statement: I did not ask for my hours to be reduced. I asked that they not be abused with excessively long days. Also, we only worked a five-day week, so that at the end of Friday, I should be able to go home or to my church for the weekend without being penalized for it.

CBS said that they have a good track record of hiring older lead actors, citing Bill Cosby and Dick Van Dyke. My response is that if either of these wonderful actors were in a top 10 show, I would gladly accept the salaries CBS would pay them.



Della Reese stars in "Touched By An Angel."

It was brought to my attention that CBS says they stand on their record of using minorities in front of the camera. I applaud them as well as the entire television industry for this. But I don't consider this disrespect because I am black, they knew I was black when they hired me. This is financial disrespect, where for some reason they find me less valuable by comparison.

Because of that press conference, many viewers have written to CBS asking them to be fair. That my value to them, as viewers, was strong enough for them to write has touched me greatly. In similar situations, many television stars have threatened to walk off their shows. I can't walk off I gave my word to God and CBS that I would do the job. I have tried to honor my word for the 60 years I've been a paid performer, and I can't change now.

But what can be done? I had received requests from groups, large and small, to boycott the show. But that is not the thing to do. The real value of "Touched By

An Angel" is the message of spirituality it gives to viewers each Sunday. The value is not in who owns the show or how they treat it. Keep watching the show. Ask friends to watch the show. Perhaps when more people take to heart the principles of faith, love and generosity of spirit; perhaps when more people are aware of what's right and wrong, then perhaps, it will spread throughout the world....even to CBS.

If you are an individual, write to your local CBS affiliate and tell them to "simply be fair to Della." If you represent an organization then write to:

Mr. Leslie Moonves  
President, CBS Entertainment  
7800 Beverly Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90036  
Ask him to allow his network to follow the principles of fairness and generosity of spirit towards Della Reese, as expounded in the hit series "Touched By An Angel."

*DELLA REESE, co-star of "Touched By An Angel," is an actor and minister.*