

## A SERVANT LEADER, DEFINED

by Sara Tusek

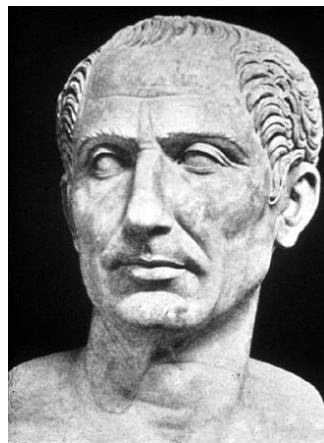
On June 28, PBS broadcast a question-and-answer session between a panel of the eight declared candidates for the Democratic nomination in the 2008 Presidential race and the audience at Howard University, a historically-Black university in Washington DC.

PBS commentator Tavis Smiley introduced the session with two quotes:

mired and imitated by people who don't follow Christ.

### THE LEADERSHIP OF JULIUS CAESAR

When Julius Caesar began his ascent to the heights of Roman power (just half a cen-



became too powerful and thus unrestrainable, was realized through military models of leadership. The rhetoric of restoring Rome was used to conceal his own ambition, providing a quasi-spiritual rationale for his actions, which were in reality those of a dictator.

**"You can't lead if you don't love; you can't save if you don't serve" —Dr. Cornell West\***

**Anyone can lead because anyone can serve" —Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

### WISDOM FROM GOD

It's interesting that the African-American community defines leadership by service. One could speculate on the social and historical roots of such a definition, in such as community.

Or one could simply note the wisdom of Smiley's approach and credit that wisdom to God, Who gave us the perfect example of a servant leader in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Leadership is a topic that invites lofty definitions and philosophical ruminations. The model of servant leadership is only one of many, and is, unfortunately, the one least likely to be ad-

mirrored before the birth of Jesus in a Roman province), he justified his aggrandizement of military might and looted wealth with the statement that he had a vision for Rome: he wanted to restore Rome to its mythical former grandeur.

In his public addresses, Caesar called upon his personal heritage as a member of the Julian family, the descendants of the gods, to lend him the mantle of authority. He used the funeral of his first wife as a platform to launch his first political campaign, leading to his appointment as Consul of Rome.

Caesar's personal ambition, which was a factor in his assassination when he

### WORLDLY LEADERSHIP

Too often the world views leadership according to a "caesarian" model: the effective leader must be personally ambitious. He gains power by cloaking his ambition in platitudes of honor and glory for the organization or country he wishes to lead.

The worldly leader uses every opportunity to extend his influence (even his wife's funeral). He gains wealth and power to further his goals, but manages to conceal his lust for control, and gain the support of his followers, by appealing to their need for vengeance (to right a "wrong"), their pride in their history (to restore the past), or their simple greed. (Go to p. 2)

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### THE DOWNFALL OF LEADERS

The worldly idea of a leader is one who successfully imposes his will on others. He may pretend to do so out of love for those he leads (and indeed may actually believe he is acting out of love), but in fact he is acting out of his own ideas about what is best for those he leads.

The problem with his leadership is that the worldly leader has no supernatural wisdom or insight to guide him. If his power is great, he has no restraining hand to prevent him from error. Even the non-Christian Greeks (living centuries before the birth of Jesus) knew well the tragedy that awaits those who put their human will above that of the gods: hamartia (the tragic flaw) and hubris (grotesquely exaggerated pride) bring down these heroes every time.

Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Hussein—the 20th century rogue’s gallery provides more than enough examples of men whose leadership became so vast that their megalomaniacal ideas went unchecked, resulting in the ruin and deaths of millions, including the people they had pledged to lead. Yet this brutal model of leadership survives.

It seems implausible that humans continue to follow these leaders who are doomed to failure. But any history book gives the details of dozens of leaders

whose ambition and greed led them to spectacular deeds of waste, destruction and contempt for human life. Any newspaper gives the details of such leaders in operation today. Humans seem to fall for the same lies, again and again.

### HOW CAN A SERVANT LEAD?

It seems paradoxical to even speak of “a servant who leads.” The two concepts don’t mesh: servants follow orders, while leaders give orders. Within this paradox lies the secret of servant leadership:

**In the Kingdom of God,  
only servants CAN lead.**

Every being in God’s Kingdom serves God, and God alone. By definition, every creation of God that has restored its

broken relationship with God is automatically a servant of God; all Christians are servants of God, through Christ (though some are more obedient servants than others!).

All of His followers, as they are obedient servants, are then leaders. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they lead others to God through Christ.

These new members of God’s kingdom will then serve Him, too, by leading the lost.



Servant leadership in God’s kingdom is very simple. It has nothing to do with personal ambition. It does not spring from greed or lust. The servant leader obeys God with love; he manifests God’s will on earth with obedience; he leads others to God’s kingdom with service.

*Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985*

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