

# The Political Page

December 2014

## Christians in high-ranking political positions

### We read

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority..." 1. Tim. 2:1-2.

### 1. A short guide for political prayer

This Political Page is a guide for this specific prayer for the "kings and all who are in authority". On the one hand, I want to show why we should pray, when God has everything under control. Then I want to ask how Christians live out their faith in their daily, political business. And thirdly, I would like to introduce a few Christians in high-ranking positions using statements, which they themselves made about their faith.

#### *Why do we pray for politics?*

Why not? Is there one single valid reason against it?

Because the "top brass" do what they want to do anyway; because everything is so complex that no one knows how one should pray; what should my little prayer change; God does what He wants, I don't want to butt in, I'm preparing myself for it.

Nevertheless, why do we pray for politics?

- Because God explicitly commanded it in His Word through the words of the Prophet Jeremia – Jer. 29:7 and the Apostle Paul – 1. Tim.2:1-2;
- Because in prayer we come before the throne of He, who has been given all the power in heaven and on earth.
- Masterfully, He guides circumstances, creates trends and puts rulers into or out of power, even if they do not know Him, like Kyros (Isa. 45:4-6) or acknowledge Him, like the Roman Emperors.
- Nevertheless, we should pray for them.
- Our prayer follows the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:10): "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are not God's advisors, but through our prayers we are the trailblazers of His will coming from heaven into the reality of our world.

Jesus also never set a limit to the many promises He made concerning prayer. They pertain to the private realm, like the church, but equally to the public realm, the economy and to politics. "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mk. 11:24). Wächterruf (Call of the Watchmen) has experienced this over and over again for the past 15 years and we are encouraged to expect even more.

How can personal faith be experienced within the scope of political engagement?

The problems our brothers and sisters in the political scene experience are often caused by the expectations and pious demands of their dear fellow-Christians. They think that if he or she would fill that position then everything would change. And fast! They do not consider the fact that, in political business – like in any other business – there are rules that apply to the political process. Whoever ventures into the political scene will be put through this "mill", a machinery with many mutual dependencies.

Furthermore, they rarely have the time to regularly attend Christian events (worship service, Bible studies etc.). They need a trustworthy circle of close friends with whom they can meet, occasionally, and who can encourage and strengthen them. And from the community of fellow-Christians they need prayer, prayer, prayer and every now and then an encouraging email that assures them of continual intercession.

What characterizes Christians in politics?

- They practice their faith in (shielded) privacy. Johannes Rau said that he reads the daily devotions. Frank-Walter Steinmeier speaks about the importance of the Bible in his life. Hermann Gröhe admits that, as a Christian, he does not have to be perfect and what it means to be forgiven.
- Although they do not flaunt it, the public knows that they are confessing Christians.
- It is shown in their lifestyle: on their conscious adherence to marriage and family and their handling of power; in their dealings with colleagues and subordinates.
- It is seen, especially, in their relationships towards political opponents. Hermann Gröhe, Secretary General of the CDU, had built up such good relationships to “the others”, which created an atmosphere for good coalition discussions.
- It also is seen in the staff (advisors, speakers) surrounding them.

Christians in politics, especially, need grace (and prayer) on the hard road to finding compromises; when to give in, when to remain steadfast? What is the goal and what is just a curve along the path? For this, especially in the committees, the light of the Holy Spirit, the gift of perception and words of wisdom are needed.

*Should Christians talk about their faith?*

Of course! The question is: when and where? And in which country.

In Moslem countries it is common to begin a speech with: “In the name of God Almighty.” This is how we begin our worship services. It is quite common in the USA when, during a Presidential election campaign, a candidate speaks of himself as being a “confessing Christian” or a “born-again Christian”. And no one finds it embarrassing.

Quite different in Germany. After his first election as President in 2004, Horst Köhler broke a taboo when, at the end of his acceptance speech, he said: “And God bless our country!” And during the great Tsumani in the Indian Ocean he said that he and his wife are praying for the victims. In his Christmas speech, Joachim Gauck chose the wording: “. . . provided that we consider ourselves Christians . . .” before he made a Christian statement.

In Germany, as a rule, politicians do not make Christian statements – except at certain places or during certain times. Then, one should listen carefully when politicians finally open their hearts and talk about their deepest convictions.

## **2. High-ranking politicians speak about their faith**

### **Angela Merkel**

(The article follows a collection of statements made by Angela Merkel on Reformation Day

Oct. 31, 2014 at her home church in Templin. In addition, there is an article from her from the series "Why I am a Christian".)

These personal statements are exceptionally special because Angela Merkel consistently shields her private life from the public.

Templin:

On this evening she speaks on the subject: "Living as a Christian – dealing as a politician." For Angela Merkel faith is not something external, "that she carries like a monstrosity in front of her", but rather something deeply existential that inwardly shapes her life. "I feel that being a Christian is an unbelievable protection." Quiet prayer and reflection are a part of her life, she said. Time and again her faith has been like an "*anchor in weak hours*, in which one hopes not to be swept away." Coming from the mouth of the woman who is repeatedly being labeled as the "world's most powerful woman", this is moving.

Another observation shows an important link between her faith and how we perceive her in public. She said in Templin that she can live in the reassuring knowledge that *she is allowed to make mistakes* because she knows that she is not perfect. In this way her faith protects her from *thoughts of grandeur* ("the world's most powerful woman), and teaches her humility. Exactly that was the cue, after her election in 2005 as Chancellor, that a SPIEGEL-interview called "humility." May her faith safeguard her in this, "for God resists the arrogant but He gives grace to the humble."

However, there also is the other Angela Merkel, who receives strength from her faith for the *inevitable conflicts* in the area of politics.

While growing up in an Evangelical parsonage in former East Germany, where she attended confirmation classes instead of going to the youth club, she learned early "that it can be right to think and decide differently. That helps me today, in a time when everything seems to be indifferent, because everything is not indifferent. Being a Christian and having had my experiences protects me from this." "Jesus stands out especially because He is completely different than the others; He is an unconventional thinker. He never was just satisfied with the state of things. My faith allows me to critically question many things, sometimes even my own faith." This is how we know the Chancellor: on the outside serenely observant, but on the inside critically assessive and then, very independently bringing her standpoint forward. However, at the same time ready to critically question herself and, if necessary, take on a new standpoint.

"This is why, my faith is the strength that makes me able to deal with conflict. I take the ability to deal with conflict (of faith) seriously because there are no quick and easy solutions to our political issues (i.e. the number of refugees for Germany or the open question of euthanasia). And I am always somewhat perplexed when Christians want to have quick results to the most difficult questions. Sometimes, it is necessary for a Christian to withstand conflicting opinions. For me, this is part of being a Christian.

She speaks of yet a fourth aspect of political life, where she feels the need for and, apparently, already has experienced God's help.

For me, being a Christian is not only a saving anchor in a weak hour but, above all, it is a creative power in those phases that set impulses and that should bring about change.

This concludes Angela Merkel's thoughts.

What a blessing it is to have such a spiritual woman and proved Christian, who is leading our country and is at the head of Europe.

**She needs prayer** for protection from people and powers, against enemies and sometimes even from friends in the party..

**She needs prayer**

for her health and for her family;

for wisdom and good sense for complex questions;

for stability in conflicts and flexibility in finding solutions;

for courage in making courageous decisions and sound judgment when restraint is called for;

for the favor of the people, of the colleagues in the EU and the favor of one's own adversaries.

For humility in all the success in Germany and throughout the world.

**She needs prayer,**

also for all the times ahead, in order to hold on to Germany's political line at the side of Israel.

## **Klaus Johannis**

On November 16<sup>th</sup> of this year, Klaus Johannis was elected as Romania's new President. This is the news.

Now the circumstances. The candidates could not have been more opposite.

The opposing candidate was Victor Ponta, the current Minister President, the Social Democratic Party (USL) candidate. A friend from Romania writes (Nov. 18, 2014): The Party "expects him to win the election and then, as President, to pardon corrupt politicians from their own ranks . . . and to prevent future prosecution of politicians." Hence, Ponta tried everything to secure his victory, while moving ahead without consideration for prevailing laws and Democratic rules of the game. Thus, he was not one who would fight the evil of corruption that oppresses Romania – a principal EU requirement for this member state. Certainly, judges and district attorneys relentlessly pursued criminal politicians, public officials and their own colleagues but the government and parliament greatly hampered their efforts.

Under Victor Ponta the government's foreign policy clearly took the direction towards Russia and China (i.e. favoritism towards the Southern-Pipeline from Russia through the Black Sea, avoiding the Ukraine). During the past years, under the USL government, five million Romanians, among them the best of their people: academic people, physicians, engineers, etc., left their country because they saw no future for their homeland. It seemed impossible to break down that corrupt power-cartel.

**Klaus Johannis** (National Liberal Party PNL) takes on this challenge. As the name suggests, Johannis belongs to a small minority of Germans called the "Siebenbürger Sachsen" (Transylvanian Saxons), who, today, barely number 36,000 people (once 350,000). Johannis, a trained high school teacher, entered into politics in the year 2000, at 41 yrs. of age. He instantly was elected to the office of mayor in his hometown of Sibiu (Hermannstadt) receiving 69% of the votes. He was re-elected in 2004 with 88% and won further re-elections up until 2012. All of these were signs of his great popularity. During these year Johannis abolished corruption and developed Hermannstadt into a flourishing city, also winning foreign investors. Supported by these successes, he was nominated by his party to become its

chairman and as opposing candidate for the presidency. My friend further writes about him: "Mr. Johannis is a practicing Evangelical Lutheran. He began the election Sunday by attending worship service at his home church in Sibiu. He has a personal relationship to God and, for him, the Bible is the most important book."

When he was interviewed by television he said:

TV: "Which book has the strongest influence on you."

KJ: "The Bible."

TV: "Do you believe in God?"

KJ: "Yes, I believe in God."

TV: "Are you a professing Lutheran?"

KJ: "I am a professing Lutheran."

TV: "Are you quite sure that you have never accepted a bribe?"

KJ: "Not only am I sure but I know that I have never accepted a bribe! Under no circumstances!"

The fact that he can be bribed under no circumstances, is currently one of the most striking traits of a Christian in Romanian politics.

Johannis also is clear in his statement concerning the continuing direction his country will take, which he clearly wants to see integrated into the Western world and its values.

The Landslide.

Two weeks prior to the first election Johannis, with 30%, still lay 10% behind Ponta. Ponta omitted nothing to make his competitor look bad and to discredit him as "not being a real Romanian", referring back to the time when, after the War and the take-over of power by the Communists, the Germans were pursued and tens of thousands sent to Siberia. But he misjudged things. Today, for many Romanians, Germany is a good example, especially for the younger generation. Even within the country one can see what the Transylvanians have achieved in the economy and in public education, especially apparent in Hermannstadt. Strangely enough, the Orthodox Church took sides with Ponta. Apparently, for her a non-Orthodox is not a Christian. Ponta made yet another mistake: By reducing the number of polling stations and not providing sufficient ballots during the first vote, he tried to prevent voting options for Romanians abroad, who, for the most part, held to Johannis. However, this maneuver was so apparent that the mood turned against him and he lost in the run-off vote with 45% to Johannis with 54%. The F.A.Z. called this course of events "historic". After 70 years of Communism and Post-Communism this was a real act of freedom towards a new future. Hope returns.

### **Spiritual Background:**

Intercessors report: "Before and during the elections a tremendous prayer movement emerged. Thousands of Romanian Christians prayed for this moment. Through the Christian television station Alfa Omega TV and the Romanian prayer network, as well as through Email and Facebook campaigns, gigantic mobilization was generated. The call to 3-day prayer and fasting was spread throughout the entire country.

And a miracle happened. The turn-around came in the afternoon at approximately 3:00 p.m. The interviews outside of the polling stations showed clearly that, at that time, strangely enough (!), only Johannis-voters came to the polls. The situation was overturned.

Europe-wide and in the country itself, there was much amazement. However, the Christians knew what had happened. God answered their prayers and pleading.

Prayer:

- Thanks, praise and worship to the God, who is able to break the most deadlocked political system.
- Thanks for the various prayer networks in Romania and for the loyalty of the intercessors.
- Thanks for President Johannis and for the way God has led him thus far.
- Petition
  - for good advisers and brothers who can support him unselfishly.
  - for the strength to clamp down on corruption.
  - for co-operation with Ponta, who will remain Prime Minister.
  - for protection for Johannis and his wife, Carmen. They have no children.
- Blessings over Romania
  - Security, infrastructure, education.
  - Foreign investors.

## Donald Tusk

Not many will know this name. And yet, last Fall he was called to one of the highest offices of the European Union (EU). He was appointed to succeed Herman van Rompoy from Belgium as President of the European Council.

The **European Council** has its own large building in Brussels. The EC meets 4 times a year with all 28 heads of state and government. Two of these meetings are held in Brussels in "their own building." These meetings are called "summits."

At these leaders' meetings, at which the President of the Commission also is present, the major guidelines of European politics are discussed and decided upon. In 1991, for example, at the Summit in Maastricht, the implementation of the Euro was decided, or in 1993 in Copenhagen, if and under which conditions would the Eastern and Middle European countries be admitted, as members to the EU. Many preliminary talks were necessary to well plan these meetings that deal with such wide-reaching decisions. That is the task of the President of the Council.

It requires a high degree of negotiating skills in order to balance the individual interests of the 28 heads of state and to steer towards a decision that will apply to all of them. Apparently, **Donald Tusk** has this gift and the trust of the leaders. They know him since 2007 when he, as the head of Poland's government, became a member of the EC. He is the first Eastern European President of the EC since the reunification, which took place 25 years ago,

Tusk, who was born in 1957, studied history, was a member of the Solidarity (Solidarnosc) and founded his own party, the Civic Platform (PO) in 2001. In 2005 the PO already was the second strongest party. In 2007 Tusk set the basis for a government under his leadership by winning 209 from 460 seats in Parliament ("Sejm"). This was so successful that he was re-elected in 2011. For the first time since the end of the Communist rule a Polish government was re-elected. Tusk and Angela Merkel are good friends and, because of this, they are able to resolve controversial issues between the countries in a spirit of mutual trust.

The thing that makes Donald Tusk special and the reason why I mention him in this context is not written in the newspapers. I have it first hand.

Tusk is Catholic. A few years ago, arranged by a mutual acquaintance, Donald Tusk came into contact with a small circle of free church pastors. Trust grew and they

prayed for him, yes, they also served him prophetically in difficult political questions, which then were confirmed in a wonderful manner. In this way, a friendship grew among them. And friends call one another by their first names. He called upon them himself and confided in them.

This stands in the background of his astonishing popularity and his re-election: his talent of a calm, friendly communicator and the prayers of his brothers in faith. Now, we are getting such a man in one of the highest-ranking offices in the EU. We can thank God for this.

For me, Tusk is an example of how a high-ranking politician is blessed when he has the humility to allow “ordinary people” who serve God, the Almighty, serve him; when he is not ashamed, like Jesus, to call them “brothers” and, like Jesus, says to them: “You are my friends.” The story of Donald Tusk reminds us of Daniel and Nehemiah, who, as men of God, were listened to by the king and were trusted by him. May God produce, in our day, many such – top secret – constellations.

Prayer:

- Thanks for Donald Tusk and for God’s good plan for him, thus far.
- Clarity about how the brothers in Brussels can continue to serve him.
- Wisdom and authority in dealing with the 28 leaders. A broad vision and God’s wisdom for the right goals for the future of Europe.
- Preservation of his humility so that God can continue to bless him.

## **Bodo Ramelow**

On December 5, 2014 Bodo Ramelow became political minority leader of the Left-Wing Party and, with a one-vote majority in the second ballot, he was elected as Prime Minister of the Free-State Thuringia. What was not possible in 2009, he now was able to build a coalition between the SPD and the Green Party. After nearly a quarter of a century the CDU lost control of power, although it was the strongest party, because the SPD was not willing to form a coalition with them. Consequently, the SPD resp. the Greens became an enabler (the “stirrup holders”) for the breach of a taboo: that a representative of the SED-successor party (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), in former East Germany, came to power. Doubtless, until then the Left-Wing Party already was part of a government alliance in three other federal states, however, they had never provided the head of government.

### *Excursus*

The CDU was in the same situation in Thuringia as in Lower Saxony: surely the strongest party but none of the other parties was ready for a coalition because the SPD and Greens decided against the CDU. Of course, the question arises automatically, whether the same could happen in the Federation in 2017, that the CDU stands alone and the Left-Wing parties team up and build a majority. As yet, the SPD firmly denies this. Likewise, up until now, the CDU categorically rules out a coalition with the AfD (Alternative for Germany). Meanwhile, this adds fuel to the flame of dissatisfaction of the Pegida Demos (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Western World). An increase in the AfD through Pegida is to be expected.

### *Who is Bodo Ramelow?*

Bodo Ramelow was born in 1956 in Osterholz-Scharmbeck, Lower Saxony. He still has two siblings. His father died when Ramelow was 11 years old. The mother pulled the family through by working as a housekeeper.

When Ramelow was 15 yrs. old he trained to be retail salesman, he continued his education and in 1977 received his advanced technical certificate.

From 1981-90 he was trade union secretary in Middle Hesse. From 1990-99, after the reunification, he became regional chairman of the trade union HBV in Thuringia. In 1999 he entered the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). In the same year he entered the "Landtag" (German state parliament) and in 2001 he became their chairman. During the "Landtag" election campaign 2004 he won 26.1% for the Left-Wing as their candidate for Prime Minister.

From 2005-09 he was a member of the German Bundestag (German Federal Parliament) for the Left-Wing Party as their "Representative for Religion".

In 2009, returning to Thuringia as top candidate for the Left-Wing, he won 27.3% but lost against the SPD, who teamed up with the CDU.

In 2014 he succeeded in building a red-red-green coalition. Bodo Ramelow became Prime Minister.

### *Bodo Ramelow as a Christian*

Bodo Ramelow professes his Christianity clearly and publicly. His family was decidedly Evangelical.

From early on, his conception of being a Christian was linked to political involvement for social justice. Those were the years after '68. He spoke out against every form of social injustice, political happenings (Vietnam) and the church. When a friend of his, who was a deacon, was shown injustice (in his opinion), he left the church. Years later, when in Bischofferode during a fight for the Kali-buddies' jobs, the Evangelical woman pastor took up position next to him. Ramelow re-entered the church. Liberation Theology against oppressors in South America is right in his direction. Ramelow is experienced in debating. His friends in Parliament called him "a one-man-opposition"; His opponents feared his toughness.

He practices his faith in this manner and freely voices it in his Party. And so it happened that, when during their party's political convention in June of last year, under the influence of anti-clerical Left-Wingers and to the amazement of everyone, the Left-Wing wanted to restrict religious freedom. Ramelow voted against his party's election program. He justified it as follows: "Everyone can say for themselves: I believe in the Christian God, in the Moslem God. Or I believe in nothing ... I don't want this spiritual freedom of choice to be distorted – irrespective of what I personally believe."

In 1999, when he was elected to Parliament, he regularly attended weekly devotions, much to the amazement of the CDU and the ridicule of his comrades. However, while taking the oath of office as the new Prime Minister, surprisingly, he omitted reference to God, "So help me God", on the grounds of separation of church and state. One has to believe him because he has no fear of man. He says what he thinks.

Presumably, he wants to keep his faith in God personal and not bring "God" as a major factor into his political business, but most certainly he lives the "fruit" of the Christian faith: justice, freedom, protection for the weak (children, the poor) etc. Ramelow is not a Christian who is influenced by pietism. Nonetheless, he has true faith.



The manner in which he lives out his faith in politics should not be measured by “religiousness” but rather by works in which faith can be seen. (James 2:17-18). At the time, it seems to please God to position His witnesses at unexpected places in society, i.e., at the peak of the Left-Wingers or elsewhere in the arts, media or economy. The form their Christianity takes on is subject to their living environment. This being the case, God gives us leeway and doesn’t restrict us by fear, but rather unlimited in faith and trust. And, therefore, also in prayer.

God sees in advance and knows what He wants to accomplish. Owing to the extreme change of government in Baden-Württemberg with its crass educational concept of “sexual variety”, God set off an avalanche of protest, which has never happened in this form before. It is still growing and now sweeps the entire “Gender” theme along with it. It is foreseeable that, in the election campaign in 2016, there will be a fundamental political dispute between the parties over Gender and “sexual variety”.

Due to the impending election of Ramelow in Thuringia the question of tackling the East German past, which had long been slumbering, suddenly was revived in the entire Federation.

Then let us await “God’s greater thoughts” and in confident prayer prepare a landing place for them. When we look back we will be amazed.

Prayer:

- Thanks that God doesn’t make mistakes.
- Ask God to show His plans for Bodo Ramelow and his government for Thuringia and all of Germany.
- Ask God to give a new attempt at overcoming the East German past.
- Pray for Prime Minister Ramelow, personally.

### 3. Final conclusions

There are more Christians in politics and also in high-ranking positions than is commonly known. There are Christians in politics in all western countries, at all levels and in all parties. They shine as lights on an often very “perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15). They are the salt in everyday political life (Matt. 5:13). They stand in for us before God in a special sense, not only in the sense of a delegation in a parliamentary system, but also in a spiritual sense in positions of political responsibility in our community. It is to our benefit when we understand this and stand behind them in prayer. And it is good for them when they understand their key role before God and consciously seize it anew, each day, by representing our community before God.

If we take another look at the four top-ranking politicians mentioned, we will recognize how each of them carry, in their Christian life, especially one characteristic of Jesus.

Angela Merkel – loyalty  
Klaus Johannis – truth  
Donald Tusk – kindness  
Bodo Ramelow – justice

Expressed in a secular manner, they would be:

For Angela Merkel – fulfillment of duties

For Klaus Johannis – transparency  
For Donald Tusk – communication  
For Bodo Ramelow – passion

And so, each one has a political key issue, influenced by his character, that is cut out for him. And that is precisely how each of them will be used by God - as a fitting instrument for exactly the situation in which He put him or her. God's tools are as diverse as the various and many situations.

All of the four are chairmen of their parties and have achieved great things for and with their parties. Yes, one can say of all four of them: What would the party be without him or her? That includes, to a special degree, a political mandate for the party's program and, therewith, not only for the government party, but also for the entire nation. They are key people, who, essentially, hold the key to all the questions coming from their country in their hands. All essential issues go first through them.

That's why they need intercession in a special manner:

- that they stay in touch with God daily;
- that they remain sincere in their hearts towards power and honor, money and bribery, sex and martial infidelity;
- that they find gifted prophetic advisors;
- that they have wisdom for decisions with unforeseeable consequences;
- that they remain psychologically and physically healthy by all the stresses and strains of their position.

*Ortwin Schweitzer*

Sources: Various articles from the F.A.Z./Sunday newspaper/mdr Summer interview/taz. The new Fischer World Atlas.

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