

## MARTENS - CHRISTIAN PERSONALISM "KEY TO HARMONY IN PLURALIST EUROPE"

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In a keynote address at the Dutch university of Leiden, Wilfried Martens argued that the Christian Democratic concept of personalism was the best starting point for re-defining the role of the state - and of resolving the cultural and religious conflicts endemic in modern society.

Personalism, which places the "human person" at the centre of political and social life, underpinned the concepts of subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good, Martens said in a lecture on Religious Pluralism and Common Values, delivered on April 17.

In fact it was the foundation stone of a pluralist society itself, the EPP President argued, going on to trace much of the confusion of modern politics - and public indifference to the democratic process - to a general failure to understand what the state is actually for.

The political "must know its limits and its responsibilities." Politics was "no more and no less than the fertilizer in the social earth of human flourishing," he said. All of the means of the state must be applied to that end, "the spiritual, intellectual, social, and emotional development of full personhood in the context of the social institutions."

The EPP leader, who oversaw the party's opening out to non-Christian Democratic traditions in the mid-1990s, said that Christian cultural and political hegemony in Europe had come to an end. But this should be interpreted as a liberation, not as a cataclysm.

Redefining the state must involve a consultation with civil society, and new mechanisms for ensuring feedback, Martens said. "That in turn will surely help with the urgent task of re-establishing the legitimacy of the state, and ending the hang-dog indifference or even hostility of the voting public to the political furniture.

"I hope very much that this kind of grown-up, almost familial, discussion of current problems may be one of the fruits of personalism-, human-centred politics. Otherwise we risk our societies being ripped apart over so many issues, from welfare reform, to European integration, to how we deal with religious extremism."

The doctrine of personalism was, Martens concluded, "the way for us to recover our core values, to articulate common values - values which might make sense to the plurality of faiths that surround us."