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KAS Nordic Countries

# Christian Democracy<sup>1</sup>

English addendum to the Norwegian edited volume: *Kristendemokrati*<sup>2</sup>  
(2023)

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This addendum gives an overview and summary of the book *Kristendemokrati* (2023). The book consists of an introductory chapter that outlines the history and main principles of the Christian Democratic movement, and places the Norwegian Christian Democrats [Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF)<sup>3</sup>] within this tradition. The remaining part of the book consists of texts by prominent Christian Democrats translated into Norwegian, with short introductions.

## Introduction

“If one had to choose one movement in ideas and party politics that has created the political world in which Europeans still live today, the answer has to be Christian Democracy”, writes Jan-Werner Müller, professor of politics. Moreover, *The Economist* has described Christian Democracy as Western Europe’s most successful political movement since 1945. However, every study of Christian Democracy notes how it has received little scholarly attention compared to some of its competitors and relative to its influence. This is especially true for Christian Democratic *ideology*. It is therefore worthwhile to gather key texts that together give a picture of core ideas and principles within this ideology. In addition, this anthology with an emphasis on Nordic – and hence Protestant – contributions to Christian Democracy expands the traditional view of this movement. A political ideology can be defined as a system of political thinking through which individuals and groups construct and understand the political world they inhabit, and then act on that understanding. For Christian Democracy this ideology draws its main influence from Christian social ethics, and especially Catholic social thought. The main principles of Christian Democratic ideology are personalism, subsidiarity, solidarity, social market economy and populism.



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<sup>2</sup> Hegstad, Eilev (Ed.) (2023). *Kristendemokrati*. Universitetsforlaget [Scandinavian University Press]. Information about the exact text excerpts printed in the book can be found pp. 373–376 or by contacting the editor at [eilev@oslomet.no](mailto:eilev@oslomet.no).

<sup>3</sup> Kristelig Folkeparti is sometimes referred to as the Norwegian Christian People’s Party in English, which is the direct translation of the name. However, KrF’s English name is Christian Democrats.

## Personalism

Personalism is the term used to describe Christian Democracy's view of man. It draws inspiration from Thomism and existentialism. The Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain has written that "to say that the human being is a person means that he has a certain dignity, i. e. that he is worthy of respect as the bearer of certain inalienable rights and duties". In addition to dignity, humans are social and relational beings. It is in relations that humans can develop and strive towards their potential. This is why Christian Democrats emphasize the family and civil society as important. Personalism was developed as an alternative to both liberalism and collectivism which were based on a materialistic view of mankind. Historically, Christianity's view of human dignity and the ideologies based on materialistic world views has been noted as a dividing line between these political movements. The idea of human rights based on every human's inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of the human family is an important part of personalism and was also central to the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity concerns distribution of power and originates in Catholic social teaching, especially the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). The starting point is that different communities have different responsibilities and goals. The family has, for example, responsibilities regarding the formation of its members. Subordinate groups should handle their own responsibilities, but higher groups can aid them when necessary. The role of the state has been compared to that of a conductor who has the responsibility for making the different members of the orchestra play well together. Similarly, the state has special responsibility for the overall functioning of society and that the smaller bodies can fulfill their tasks. As the nation state cannot solve all its tasks on its own, international cooperation is necessary. Christian Democrats were crucial in the founding of the European Union and the principle of subsidiarity is now part of EU law. Similar principles can be found in Lutheran and Reformed theology in the form of 'life groups' and 'sphere sovereignty'.

## Solidarity

Solidarity is based on a common humanity which includes everyone across class, social, and economic backgrounds. Moreover, solidarity also includes future generations. It is a duty to care for the people around us, especially the poor in our own society and in the world. This view of solidarity is different than the Marxist concept where solidarity is based on shared interests in the working class. Professor emeritus of social policy Steinar Stjernø claims that the main difference between a Christian Democratic understanding of solidarity and a Social Democratic one is that Christian Democrats include subsidiarity while Social Democrats emphasize equality. This can be seen in how Christian Democrats emphasize the family, civil society and local government as important drivers of social policy, while Social Democrats prefer more centralized administration. There is in part a conflict between subsidiarity and equality because decentralization means accepting inequality. Solidarity includes redistribution, but not radical redistribution, with the goal of equal opportunities rather than social uniformity.

## Social market economy

Christian Democrats' thought on the economy and welfare is described as social market economy or social capitalism. There are two main sources for this thinking: social Catholicism and ordoliberalism. The market is accepted as the framework for the economy but needs regulation and social policy is given an important role. One central element is the distribution of ownership and the fight against both private and state monopolies. The writer G. K. Chesterton has for example written that "too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists". The political scientist Kees van Kersbergen has identified a Christian Democratic welfare model that he describes as social capitalism. The main goal of this model is to reconcile conflicts and accomplish social integration. While it has a similar level of social spending as the Social Democratic model, this money is spent differently. It is more often given in the form of benefits in cash rather

than in kind. This ensures that families can take responsibility for themselves. In addition, the tax system prioritizes families. The system is also less centralized than in the Social Democratic model. Regional and local authorities are given greater say and private and non-for-profit organizations are given a greater role.

## Popularem

Several Christian Democratic parties, like the European People's Party (EPP) use the term "people's parties" to describe themselves. This is because these parties want to represent the whole nation rather than only some of its parts and strive for the common good. Instead of viewing politics as a fight between different interests, politics should be about solving conflicts through inclusion and mediation. Christian Democratic parties have by some been seen as pragmatic and opportunistic. But considering what van Kersbergen sees as distinct; this pragmatism can also be understood as an integral part of Christian Democratic thought. Advocating for proportional representation, rather than first-past-the-post-systems, is a way to have larger parts of society represented in politics. It also forces different groups in society to cooperate and find compromises. Christian Democrats have also been mindful of the fact that democracies, if not constrained, can lead to anti-democratic policies being adopted and authoritarian politicians gaining power. It is therefore necessary to discipline democracy in the form of individual rights, constitutional review and supranationality.

## Norwegian Christian Democracy

The Norwegian Christian Democrats is sometimes seen as an exclusively Norwegian political phenomenon that inspired similar parties in the Nordic countries (Finland 1958, Sweden 1964 and Denmark 1970). The distinctiveness of these parties has often been overemphasized and important commonalities with their sister parties on the continent have therefore been overlooked. This is especially peculiar as KrF and the other Nordic parties have adopted the 'language of Christian Democracy'. In KrF's case they were present at the founding of Nouvelles Équipes Internationales (NEI) in 1947, an organization for Christian Democratic political parties. However, it is only in the party program from 1985 that the term "Christian Democratic thought" is first used. Before this the party described itself as a 'Christian party of ideas'. However, it can be added that these ideas were similar to those that inspired the Christian Democratic parties on the continent with one important exception. Although KrF has always been concerned with foreign policy, especially with international development, they have not supported Norwegian membership of the European Union. The tension between policies based on Christian principles and politics conducted by Christian persons have also been more prevalent in KrF than in other parties. It was only in 2011 that the party removed a clause in its statutes that required people with positions in the party to be Christians.

# Summary of text excerpts included in the anthology

## Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) – *Rerum Novarum*

Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci became Pope Leo XIII after his election in 1878. He has been described as the first modern pope as he engaged constructively with the challenges of the modern world. His encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) is the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching and also an important inspiration for many Christian Democrats. It has been called the *Magna Carta* of Catholic social teaching and many of its ideas have been elaborated upon in later encyclicals, for example the principle of subsidiarity in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). *Rerum Novarum* concerned itself with the relation between capital and labor. Pope Leo XIII charts a path between socialism and *laizze-faire* capitalism. The Pontiff argued for property rights as well as fair wages and the right for workers to form unions.

### **Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) – *Sphere sovereignty***

Abraham Kuyper was a Dutch journalist, theologian and politician who established a daily newspaper, *De Standaard*, in 1872, the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij in 1879, as well as an exodus from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1886. He was the head of government from 1901–1905. *Sphere sovereignty* was a speech given at the opening of Vrije Universiteit in 1880. It expresses Kuyper's political vision of God being master in every sphere even though power amongst fallen humans are divided into different spheres. Kuyper therefore established a free (vrije) university independent of both state and church authority. Power should be shared between different spheres like the family, church, education and the state. The different spheres have their own identity and purpose. Sphere sovereignty is a principle for the distribution of power and has similarities with the Catholic principle of subsidiarity.

### **Luigi Sturzo (1871–1959) – *I problemi della vita nazionale dei cattolici italiani (I) and La Costituzione del partito (II)***

Luigi Sturzo was an Italian priest and politician that established the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) in 1919 where he became general secretary. He was forced into exile by the Fascists from 1924–1946 and worked to establish relations between Christian Democratic parties in different countries. In a speech in Caltagirone (I) in 1905 he expressed his desire for a party based on Christian principles, but not as an extension of the Church or under its authority. The party's program, argued Sturzo, must be both democratic and social. Sturzo's vision was realized with the establishment of the PPI. The appeal of the party (II) included a political program that wanted decentralization, reforms in social policy and suffrage for woman, amongst other things. Sturzo influenced, among others, Alcide De Gasperi and Democrazia Cristiana.

### **Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967) – *Erinnerungen (1945-1953) (I) and Rede in der Aula der Universität zu Köln (II)***

Konrad Adenauer was Mayor of Cologne (1917–1933) for the Catholic party Zentrum and central in the establishment of Christian Democratic Union (CDU), of which he became the leader, after the war. He was the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949–1963) and one of the architects of European integration. In the *Erinnerungen (I)* Adenauer writes about the need for a party with a Christian worldview that is concerned with the whole of society. In the speech (II) that was held after the second world war Adenauer analyses how Germany could be taken over by the Nazis. He points to the tendency to give the state the role of God to the materialist worldview. In opposition to this Adenauer explains why the CDU calls itself Christian Democratic and that its vision is rooted in the Christian view of man.

### **Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) – *Man and the State***

Jacques Maritain was a French Catholic philosopher whose political philosophy inspired many Christian Democrats, especially in Latin America and Italy. Maritain was involved, through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with preparatory work for the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. His experience, which he draws on in *Man and the State* (1950) – which is an influential application of Thomistic natural law on the relation between citizen, state, church, sovereignty and democracy – with people from different worldviews being able to agree on a set of fundamental human rights led him to argue for a democratic charter. This democratic charter is a set of principles for communal life which is necessary for a democracy. Maritain was instrumental in rethinking the Catholic churches' attitude to liberal democracy and human rights.

### **Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959) – *Staten og mennesket***

Eivind Berggrav was one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most important church leaders. He became the bishop of Oslo in 1937 and was a leading figure in the Norwegian church's resistance to the Nazi occupation. He argued for a reinterpretation of Luther's two kingdoms doctrine where he emphasized that God was the ruler of both kingdoms, the spiritual and the temporal. This was in opposition to those that emphasized obedience to the

authorities. Berggrav's interpretation meant that the authorities had to be measured against the word of God and opened up the possibility for protest when this was violated. The book *Staten og Mennesket* (1945), which was written during the second world war gives the most complete statement of his Christian social thought. Here he argues for a principle similar to subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty for 'life groups' with their own purpose and tasks.

### **Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974) – *Ny mark***

Lewi Pethrus was Sweden's most influential church leader in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and founder of institutions like a weekly and a daily newspaper, a bank, a radio station and a Christian Democratic party, Kristen Demokratisk Samling (KDS), in 1964. His informal leadership of the Pentecostal movement in Sweden has led him to be described as the movement's bishop. As a party with strong roots in the Pentecostal movement it distinguishes itself from many other Christian Democratic parties. The party was formed as a reaction to secularization and a lack of Christian influence in politics. In the book, *Ny mark* (1966), Pethrus describes his main political ideas and the reasons for establishing KDS. He was critical to the dechristianization of society and argued that Christianity had a preventive effect on society's excesses. Pethrus was also concerned for the poor and supported the expansion of the welfare state.

### **Robert Schuman (1886–1963) – *L'Europe, c'est la mise en oeuvre d'une démocratie généralisée dans le sens chrétien du mot***

Robert Schuman was prime minister (1947–1948) and foreign minister (1948–1953) for Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP) in France. As foreign minister he worked for European integration and is famous for the Schuman declaration (1950) which proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community. He was given the title "Father of Europe" by the European Parliament in 1960. In *Pour L'Europe* (1963) Schuman gathers speeches and articles which gives an overview of his political ideas. He argues that the Christian notion that all humans are created equal is what has led us to democracy and an anti-Christian democracy would be a caricature and inevitably lead to tyranny or anarchy. On European integration he thought that European institutions were not sufficient to create Europe, it also needed a soul and a common human ideal.

### **Oswald von Nell-Breuning (1890–1991) – *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft: Solidarität und Subsidiarität***

Oswald von Nell-Breuning was a Jesuit, political economist and West-Gemany's Catholic nestor. He drafted the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) which was published 40 years after *Rerum Novarum*. The encyclical concerns the social and economic order and the principle of subsidiarity is first formulated here. His writings and membership of several advisory bodies under the CDU government gave him great influence. His book *Baugesetze der Gesellschaft: Solidarität und Subsidiarität* (1990) is a summary of the Jesuit and economist Henrich Pesch's (1854–1926) five volume *Lehrbuch der Nationalökonomie* (1905–1923). Nell-Breuning writes in the book that the two most important building laws for society is solidarity and subsidiarity.

### **Edith Stein (1891–1942) – *Die Frau: Fragestellungen und Reflexionen***

Edith Stein combined phenomenology and Thomism in a novel way, concerned with 'the person' and human empathy and can be understood as an exponent of Christian Democratic feminism. Stein worked as a philosopher but decided to become a Carmelite nun after Hitler banned Jews from working. She was arrested in 1942 and sent to Auschwitz. Her thinking concerned itself with questions about human nature and the human person. She believed that women could work in all professions, but at the same time that women had a unique nature that was commonly overlooked and trivialized. In her complete works volume 13 *Die Frau: Fragestellungen und Reflexionen* she reflects on women's education, which she argued must be customized to fit with women's specific nature. Her thinking about the communities that should contribute to women's formation – family, state and church – resembles the principle of subsidiarity.

## **Dorothy Day (1897–1980) – The scandal of the works of mercy**

Dorothy Day was a journalist, political activist, Catholic convert and one of the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement. The movement was based on personalism, distributism, pacifism and priority for the poor. The Catholic Worker movement is an example of how ideas that are central to Christian Democratic ideology has influenced not only political parties, but also social movements. Inspired by G. K. Chesterton's (1874–1936) distributism, Day was opposed to both government and private monopolies. She was also skeptical to government welfare programs because people would no longer feel the need to help those around them. Her personalism emphasized the personal obligation to each other which is rooted in human's social nature. In the text "The scandals of the works of mercy" which first appeared in *Commonweal* in 1949 Day describes the ideas that is at the foundation of the Catholic Worker Movement.

## **Wilhelm Röpke (1899–1966) – Jenseits von Angebot und Nachfrage: Die Marktwirtschaft ist nicht Alles**

Wilhelm Röpke was an economist in the ordo-liberal tradition who believed in "economic humanism", where human freedom, quality of life and human dignity are the central goals of the economy. Röpke influenced economic policy in West-Germany under Konrad Adenauer's chancellorship. He believed that it was not sufficient for a functioning market economy to have a set of rules and a liberal and democratic political order, but it also needed a reservoir of moral values and virtues. In the essay "Jenseits von Angebot und Nachfrage: Die Marktwirtschaft ist nicht Alles" published in 1956 Röpke criticizes contemporary phenomenon such as excessive focus on utility, centralization and commercialization. He thought these might undermine the cultural and moral preconditions for a functioning market economy and a liberal political order.

## **Rafael Caldera (1916–2009) – Especificidad de la Democracia Cristiana**

Rafael Caldera was a Christian Democratic pioneer in Latin-America, both in formulating Christian Democratic ideology, but also as a practicing politician and as president in Venezuela 1969–1974 and 1994–1999. He was also president for The Christian Democrat Organization of America (1964–1968) and for The World Union of Christian Democrats (1967–1968). International social justice was central to Caldera's thought. Social justice within countries was an accepted goal, but Caldera thought that relations between countries, especially rich and poor, should conform to ideas of social justice as well. Caldera also believed that Christian Democratic parties must be revolutionary – without the use of violence – in countries with grave social problems. The book *Especificidad de la Democracia Cristiana*, first published in 1972, is based on courses that Caldera held for young Christian Democrats in Latin-America.

## **Jakob Aano (1920–2016) – Eit politisk handlingsprogram på kristen demokratisk grunn (I) and Kristen-demokratisk kulturpolitikk (II)**

Jakob Aano was a parliamentarian for the Norwegian Christian Democrats and crucial in spreading Christian Democratic ideology both inside and outside the political party. He was a co-founder of the journal *Idé - tidsskrift for kristen demokratisk samfunnsdebatt* in 1967. The Christian view of man was the starting point for Aano's political thought. Aano was concerned with European and international cooperation, especially development aid. The two chapters are from a two-volume anthology on Christian Democratic social thought in Norwegian edited by Aano in 1972 and 1973. The first (I) chapter describes Christian Democracy as third way thinking in opposition to capitalism and socialism, while the second (II) is concerned with cultural policies.

## **Rowan Williams (1950–) – What is a Person? Reclaiming Relationality in an Uncooperative Age**

Rowan Williams is one of his generation's most important church leaders and theologians. He was the archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 until 2012. His social thought emphasizes human relations, personalism and pluralism. It is because of the similarities between Williams' political thought and Christian Democracy, especially his personalism, that he has been included here. In the text "What is a Person?" he argues that we

are relational beings with our relation to God as our most fundamental. This view stands in opposition to modern individualism with its unease with limits which we can see in our exploitation of the environment and our expectation of endless growth. A personalist perspective is both more realistic as to what humans actually are, but also a more fruitful starting point for life in a good society.

### **Angela Merkel (1954–) – Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel zur Eröffnung des Katholisch-Sozialen Instituts am 4. Mai 2017 in Siegburg (I) and Mein Luther (II)**

Angela Merkel was the first female chancellor of Germany and the first to come from the former East-Germany. She was leader of the Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU) and chancellor from 2005–2021. She was a pragmatic and moderate politician which can be understood as a distinguishing characteristic of Christian Democracy. In the speech from 2017 (II) she talks about freedom and the relevance of a Christian worldview for the development of society. Merkel claims that humans are born free but that this is not a freedom without obligations. We are free to be responsible for ourselves, but also always for others. In *Mein Luther* (I) Merkel reflects that as long as society consists of sinful and imperfect human beings, we cannot create a perfect society.

### **Erik Lunde (1979–) – Uønsket: Mennesket i sorteringens tid**

Erik Lunde has been crucial in raising the knowledge and interest in Christian Democracy in Norway, through his book *Kristendemokrati: Et forsvar for det ufullkomne samfunnet* (2014) [Christian Democracy: A defense of the imperfect society]. He has worked in different capacities within the party organisation of KrF and was from 2011–2019 member of Oslo City Council. The text is from the book *Uønsket: Mennesket i sorteringens tid* (2017) [Unwanted: Humans in the age of sorting] where Lunde discusses abortion based on characteristics such as gender. The book starts with the case of India and uses this as a framework to analyze the Norwegian debate where new technology makes choices around reproduction more prevalent. Lunde shows how equality comes into conflict with utilitarian ideas that claim some people do not live fully worthy lives.

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