

## Trump's Warsaw Speech Reflects a Personalist Nationalism

By Jim Kelly  
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Contrary to the criticism of those who portray President Donald Trump's recent speech at the Warsaw Uprising Monument as an illiberal, nationalist call-to-arms, an analysis of the themes covered in the speech evidence a "personalist nationalism." The features of this personalist nationalism are consistent with identical themes Pope John Paul II addressed in a 1980 speech to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and his 1993 reflections published in the 2005 book *Memory and Identity*.

Personalism is a philosophy that stresses the dignity of the individual person and, at the same time, his social nature and vocation to communion with others. In his 1961 paper "Thomistic Personalism," then priest (later Pope John Paul II) Karol Wojtyla emphasized that each person has a spiritual nature, consisting of reason and free will, and exists and acts in a manner that creates societies and communities. Thus, personalist nationalism is a nationalism that makes it possible for a person to exercise reason and freedom in a manner that respects his dignity and his ability to commune with others.

Early in his remarks, President Trump observed how Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries "endured a brutal campaign to demolish freedom, your faith, your laws, your history, your identity—indeed the very essence of your humanity."

Similarly, in his UNESCO speech, Pope John Paul II explained how culture is the specific way of man's "existing and being." "Man always lives according to a culture which is specifically his, and which, in its turn, creates among men a tie which is also specifically theirs, determining the inter-human and social character of human existence."

He expressed pride in being the son of a Nation, which, in his opinion, has lived the greatest experience in history. He observed that, in spite of its neighbors having condemned Poland to death several times, by relying on its culture, Poland "has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity, and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty."

Yet, Pope John Paul II explained that his remark concerning the right of a Nation to the foundation of its culture and its future "is not the echo of any 'nationalism,' but it is always a question of a stable element of human experience and of the humanistic perspective of man's development." In *Memory and Identity*, he explains that, through patriotism, nations can avoid an "unhealthy nationalism," as patriotism "is a love for one's native land that accords rights to all other nations equal to those claimed for one's own."

After celebrating the survival of Poland's culture and humanity, President Trump movingly observed how the Polish people, following their liberation from Soviet occupation, asked not

for wealth or privilege, but, at a Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II, sang the words “We Want God.” Later in his remarks, he explained that the community of nations, consisting of the United States of America and Europe, treasure the rule of law and protect the right to free expression.

Similarly, in his UNESCO speech, Pope John Paul II explained that the fundamental dimension of human existence is an “integral” man who lives simultaneously in the sphere of material and spiritual values and that any threat to human rights in either one of these spheres does violence to this dimension.

President Trump explained that, to protect the West from the threats of radical Islamic terrorism, Russian aggression, and expanding government bureaucracies, a strong alliance among a community of free, sovereign, and independent nations is needed.

This explanation echoed the warning Pope John Paul II issued to the UNESCO delegates, when he urged them to “with all the means at your disposal, watch over the fundamental sovereignty that every Nation possesses by virtue of its own culture. Cherish it like the apple of your eye for the future of the great human family. Protect it! Do not allow this fundamental sovereignty to become the prey of some political or economic interest. Do not allow it to become a victim of totalitarian and imperialistic systems or hegemonies.”

President Trump’s speech highlighted the features of Western Civilization that will cause it to prevail against challenges to the fundamental sovereignty of nations, including its creative capacities, pursuit of excellence, exploratory spirit, and love of knowledge, and emphasis on faith and family.

Likewise, in *Memory and Identity*, Pope John Paul II describes the achievements of Poland’s great 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, musicians, artists, and playwrights. In his view, this “extraordinary cultural maturity” fortified the Poles for the great struggle against Communist totalitarianism, which led the Nation to regain its independence. He explains that the most important contribution the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can make to the formation of a united Europe is to defend their identity.

President Trump’s vision for a personalist nationalism is strikingly similar to Pope John Paul II’s vision and is worthy of further consideration, not politically-motivated derision.

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