

only a fragment of the individual—for example, in the state, the nation, the class—there is a very great danger of instrumentalizing the person, once his function as a member is considered to be more important than his being as an individual person.

14. The central foundation for every living consciousness of community, and for a new awakening of life out of a “we” (such as we find in the Church’s liturgy), is a very profound respect for the individual person, his eternal worth, and his inalienable rights, together with a clear insight into the terrible sin that lies in every instrumentalization of the person and his being, which occurs when the person is seen primarily as a mere means for the production of non-personal goods.

15. Every form of anti-personalism (which is seen most clearly in Bolshevism and National Socialism) is a logical consequence of liberalism’s failure to recognize the true essence and value of the person. But such anti-personalism goes far beyond what existed in liberalism, since it intensifies the individualistic error and disvalue. Anti-personalism is the great and terrible danger of our times. Irrespective of the guise under which it presents itself, this poison must not be allowed a role in the construction of genuine community.

16. No less important than the revitalization of the consciousness of community is a renewed understanding of the objective hierarchy of communities: first the Church as *corpus Christi mysticum* (*Mystical Body of Christ*), then mankind, then the nation, then the state, and so on. The due consideration of this objective hierarchy is more important than all the autonomy of the individual natural communities. The idolization of a community, which permits its autonomy to run rampant and is typical of all forms of nationalism and all idolatry of the state, demolishes the real spirit of community—that is, of genuine and objective community. Such idolatry is every bit as egocentric as the individualism of a single person.

Today it seems more necessary than ever to keep these various elements clearly in mind as we undertake a fundamental clarification of the errors of individualism and collectivism. There can be no doubt that the hallmark of the present epoch is an “anti-personalism”—one of the most terrible aberrations of the human spirit—and that it is not only

non-Catholic, but (whether consciously or not) extremely anti-Catholic. This anti-personalism, which finds its dreadful and unambiguously consistent expression in Bolshevism and National Socialism, is also present in a hidden and implicit form in many other contemporary attitudes: in the cult of the unconscious, in the idol of the “new objectivity,” in nationalism’s deification of the nation, in the idolization of the state, and so on.

The more we grasp the whole greatness and depth of the human being as a spiritual person who is ordered to God and possesses an eternal destiny, and the more we overcome the great danger of our times—the objectification and effacing of personal being—the more we will be able to bring about the revitalization of the authentic spirit of community. The correct starting point for the victory of the true and Christian idea of corporative community lies here, in a reawakening to the entire fullness of personal being. But the path to this goal is also indicated by the perennial admonition in the words of the Gospel: “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

*Dietrich von Hildebrand went on to have a second life in America. He taught at Fordham University in New York until 1960, but even in retirement his philosophical energies never abandoned him. He continued to write voluminously until his death on January 26, 1977. There is a rich vision of individual and communal flourishing that informs his work as a whole; a vision that is waiting to be discovered by a new generation.*