



The Fallen Idol

Neoliberalism has failed. Catholic social teaching can help us replace it with something better.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “The failure of neoliberalism has brought us to a dangerous juncture,” Anthony Annett writes. How have you seen neoliberal values—individualism, efficiency, competition—fail to serve individuals and communities? Who is left behind in a neoliberal economy that idolizes free markets and privatization?

2. The pandemic has unsettled the U.S. labor market in profound ways, causing workers to question what exactly they want from their jobs and whether they’re being treated fairly. (And in some cases, to quit!) How might Catholic social teaching be incorporated into our changing ideas about work, vocation, and wages?

3. Subsidiarity “calls for higher-order associations, including the state, to promote but not usurp the responsibilities of lower-order associations” like unions and small businesses. How has the pandemic reignited debates about local versus national authority? Can you think of a time when you saw a “higher-order association” successfully support a “lower-order institution” to the benefit of a community?

4. What would it take to reorient our economy around solidarity and reciprocity? Which policies—not just at the level of government, but in our neighborhoods and churches—might allow us to better care for the poor and for creation?

5. Annett suggests that GDP growth is an inadequate standard for measuring human flourishing. How else might we gauge society’s happiness and well-being? Should leaders try to take such measures into account when making decisions?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Dorothy Day, “The Scandal of the Works of Mercy,” November 1949: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/scandal-works-mercy>

Dorothy Day, “We Plead Guilty,” December 1957: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/we-plead-guilty>

Eugene McCarragher, “Undemocratic by Design,” October 2018: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/undemocratic-design>

Samuel Moyn, “Neoliberalism, Not Liberalism, Has Failed,” December 2018:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/neoliberalism-not-liberalism-has-failed>

Paul Lakeland, “Spiritual Resistance,” June 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/spiritual-resistance>

David Albertson & Jacob Blakely, “From Here to Utopia,” May 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/here-utopia>

Vincent Miller, “Mushroom as Metaphor,” July 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/mushroom-metaphor>

Kristin Heyer, “A Reparative Vision,” August 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/reparative-vision>