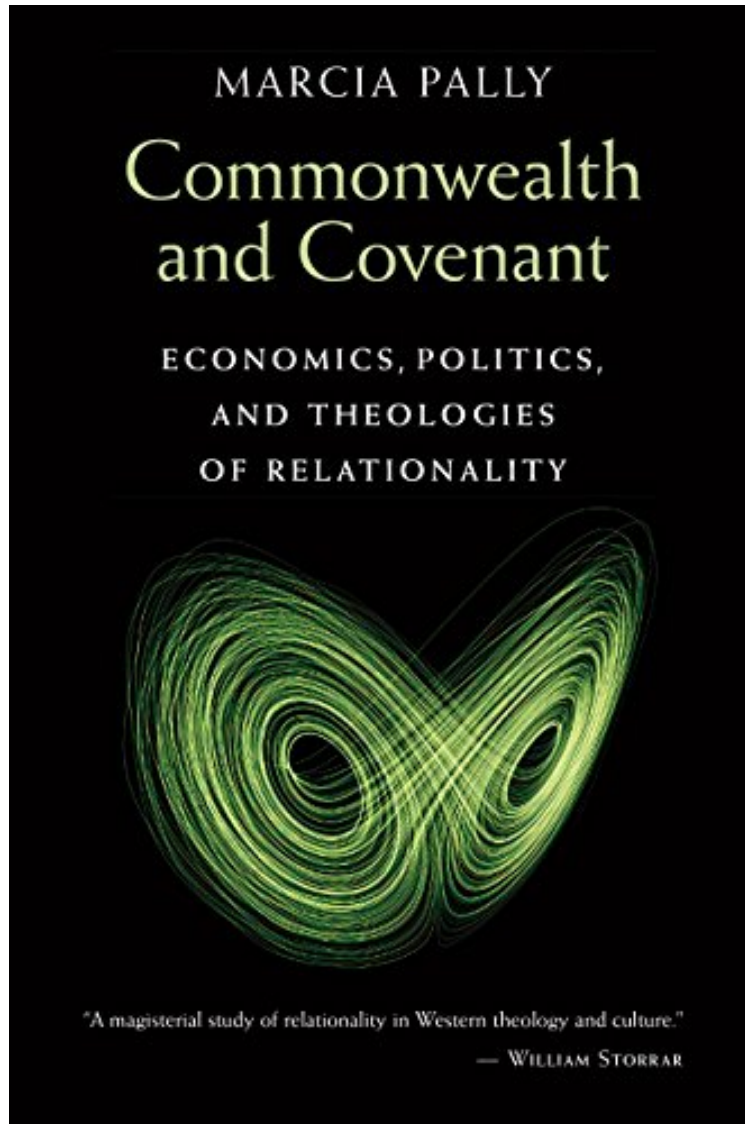


Commonwealth and Covenant: Economics, Politics, and Theologies of Relationality

Marcia Pally

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Marcia Pally : Commonwealth and Covenant: Economics, Politics, and Theologies of Relationality before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Commonwealth and Covenant: Economics, Politics, and Theologies of Relationality:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Marcia Pally explores the idea of covenant for politics and economics By Thomas J. Farrell The rich people in the world today keep getting richer, but an estimated one billion people in the world today live on a dollar a day or less. See Paul Collier's book The Bottom Billion: Why the

Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It (Oxford University Press, 2007). As progressives and liberals in the United States know, the Republican Party includes economic libertarians such as the Koch brothers -- some of whom live under the influence of Ayn Rand's novels, as does Representative Paul Ryan from Wisconsin, who claims to be a Roman Catholic. But Pope Francis follows the Roman Catholic tradition of thought in emphasizing the common good. No doubt the Koch brothers and other greedy billionaires imagine that their philanthropic foundations contribute to the common good. Their philanthropies show that the common good may not be a strong enough conceptual framework for calling attention to certain problems involving greedy billionaires -- not that the conceptual framework of the common good should be discarded, but it may need to be fleshed out more fully, so to speak. But what conceptual framework, if any, might be more adequate? In the ambitious and accessible new scholarly book *Commonwealth and Covenant: Economics, Politics, and Theologies of Relationality* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), Marcia Pally creatively constructs a fresh new way of thinking about the ancient Hebrew conceptual framework of the covenant, the conceptual framework that the ancient Hebrew prophets such as Amos worked with. No doubt the ancient Hebrew prophet Amos is the example followed today by Pope Francis -- inveighing about greedy rich people today and by Senator Bernie Sanders -- inveighing about greedy rich people today. I would liken Marcia Pally to both a busy bee flying from one flower to another and then another gathering food for thought from various authors, including certain secular authors, and to Anansi the clever spider as she constructs her spider's web of thought in her new book. However, I am sorry to report that Pally does not mention the work of the American Jesuit cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003), who claimed that his work was phenomenological and personalist in cast. The personalist cast of Ong's work includes his numerous references to Martin Buber's I-Thou communication. In terms of broad categories, the personalism of the French author Emmanuel Mounier was a subset of European existentialism. In the United States, personalism found a home in theology at Boston University, where the young Martin Luther King, Jr., studied personalism -- as Pally notes in passing (page 26, esp. footnote 76). (Almost every page of the 350-page text of her book includes footnotes at the foot of the page.) Now, in the 1966 book *The Duality of Human Existence: An Essay on Psychology and Religion*, David Bakan, a Jewish faculty member in psychology at the University of Chicago, works with the terms agency and communion. According to him, we can seriously over-develop either psychological tendency, in which cases we tend to seriously under-develop the other psychological tendency. In his view, the optimal development of both of these tendencies would be desirable. Vicki S. Helgeson in psychology works with Bakan's two terms in her own psychological research, which she ably sums up in her 700-page textbook *The Psychology of Gender*, the fifth edition of which is scheduled to come out this summer. The spirit of communion is involved in communication when two or more persons commune with one another. What Bakan and Helgeson refer to as agency is involved in what Pally refers to as separability and distinction. Conversely, what they refer to as communion is involved in what she refers to as situatedness and relation. Now, the Jewish sociologist at Harvard David Riesman delineates three basic character types in American culture in his 1950 book *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*: (1) outer-directed people (also known as tradition-directed people); (2) inner-directed people; and (3) other-directed people. Because Riesman himself was a deeply inner-directed person, he was worried about the then-emerging other-directed people that he describes. In Pally's terminology, outer-directed people (also known as tradition-directed) tend to be overly involved in their cultural situatedness -- and not sufficiently differentiated to develop their own personal separability and distinction. In Pally's terminology, inner-directed people tend to have over-developed their sense of separability. No doubt economic libertarians such as the Koch brothers and Ayn Rand fans such as Representative Ryan are deeply oriented toward inner-directedness. But in Pally's terminology, optimally developed other-directed people have effectively worked out a proper balance between their sense of separability and distinction, on the one hand, and, on the other, their sense of situatedness and relation. Now, I have already mentioned I-thou communication because Ong never tired of mentioning I-thou communication. Here's what Pally has to say about I-thou communication (with her capitalizations): "As Martin Buber's theology of the I-Thou encounter is well known, I shall here highlight only three points relevant to relationality. First, in contrast to the I-Thou (recognizing the singularity of the other and what of God is in her [or him]) stands the I-It, projecting generalities or assumptions onto another, an abrogation of covenantal bond, as [Emmanuel] Levinas and [Simone] Weil too wrote. Second, as I-Thou is the only sort of encounter one can have with God, relationship with God is the ground for I-Thou among persons each time it occurs -- each time one takes the time to recognize the divine in a person. Yet, echoing the twined covenant, these moments of I-Thou with others are also how we come to I-Thou with God. 'God appears when people truly meet others'; [says Buber]. Third not only must each reach toward the I-Thou bond, persons must live in the sorts of communities where this type of relationship is fostered. 'Society is naturally composed not of disparate individuals but of associative units and associations between them'; [Pally's footnote on page 211 refers to G. Alperowitz's article 'Building a Living Democracy' in *Sojourners*, volume 19, number 6 (July 1990): page 15] (pages 210-211). The distinguished American Buber scholar Maurice Friedman (1921-2012) explores the sorts of communities in his book *Genuine Dialogue and Real Partnership: Foundations of True Community* (Trafford Publishing, 2011). He distinguishes

communities of affinity (like-minded people) from communities of otherness. Many Americans have experienced communities of affinity. Dr. King helped galvanize grassroots support for the black civil rights movement by preaching not only at American colleges and universities but also at churches (i.e., communities of affinity). Pally notes that "democracy falters when citizens are so occupied by survival that they cannot consider the big picture or the long term. Thinkers as diverse as Aristotle, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Edmund Burke, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hill Green, and Hannah Arendt have noted the difficulties of contributing to the public sphere under conditions of privation" (page 30). Pally's readable new book is aimed at students and teachers at American colleges and universities and at pastors and their congregations and at journalists. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Important but hard to understand By Barbara LI was disappointed because the book is anything but easy-to-read and easy-to-understand. This makes me angry because the author has something important to explain: a possible solution to an economic situation that isn't being addressed by any so-called leaders of whom I am aware. However, I needed a dictionary to translate her thoughts. I'm serious. I had an old-fashion paper dictionary next to me as I read as well as the internet opened and at ready to do searches for meanings. The author is writing for academics instead of people like me. People like me know how to read and to think but prefer 10 cent words to dollar bill words. I hate having to wade through what this person or that person says that supports the author's thinking. I really don't care what this person or that person said or thought; I want to know what the author thinks. I would like the author to translate her work for people like me. She is saying something important that is lost in the mixture of dollar bill words and the 'this person said this and that person said that' nonsense. I kept reading because every once in awhile she makes reference to the thinking of Ernest Holmes and Mary Baker Eddy, both New Thought thinkers. However, I depended on an article written by David Brooks, an Opinion writer for the Atlanta GA Journal and Constitution, to translate the book for me. Using both the writings of the author and David Brooks I think the author says this: The author identifies economic globalization, the internet and global migration as giving individuals more choice. However, this choice has come at the cost of loss of community and the social safety net. It seems that humans, in order to be healthy and productive, need to be part of strong families and thriving communities, the very things being destroyed either as an unintended consequence of present day change, or being destroyed on purpose by those who live in fear of not having enough (think multi millionaires and billionaires as well as the rest of us). Dr. Pally suggests that what is needed to solve most of today's problems is a covenant between people in which the people agree that they are part of one another, a people who delight in offering their talents, skills and abilities as gifts to one another and a people who recognize that each of us has worth and dignity; and that each is needed in order for each individual to be whole. In other words, it's time that we work together to bring forth a world that works for everyone.

In *Commonwealth and Covenant* Marcia Pally argues that in order to address current socioeconomic problems, we need not more economic formulas but rather a better understanding of how the world is set up — an ontology of how we and the world work. Without this, good proposals that arise lack political will and go unimplemented. Pally describes our basic setup as "separability-amid-situatedness" or "distinction-amid-relation." Though we are all unique individuals, we become our singular selves through our relations and responsibilities to the people and environments around us. Pally argues that our culture's overemphasis on "separability" — individualism run amok — results in greed, adversarial and deceitful political discourse and chicanery, resource grabbing, broken relationships, and anomie. Maintaining that separability and situatedness can and must be considered together in public policy, Pally draws on intellectual history, philosophy, and — especially — historic Christian and Jewish theologies of relationality to construct a new framework for addressing present economic and political ills.

Journal of Markets and Morality "This erudite and original book offers a substantial contribution in its articulation of the political and economic implications of a theology of covenant and relationality." *Religious Studies* "Pally masterfully brings political and economic ethics together with a sound theological narrative." *William Storrar* — Center of Theological Inquiry "Has the West lost its pizzazz and gravitas? asks Marcia Pally at the start of *Commonwealth and Covenant*. Not if we read this magisterial study of relationality in Western theology and culture, brimming as it is with her signature brio and erudition as a leading thinker on religion and society. With an original and compelling thesis as her lantern, Pally lights up not only the history of ideas with dazzling insight but also our present parlous state with hopeful remedy." *Harvey Cox* — Harvard University "In her previous writing Marcia Pally has demonstrated keen insight into the American religious situation. In this well-crafted and highly readable book she takes a central principle in the American spiritual heritage — the covenant — and relates it with impressive skill to the psychological and political dimensions of our lives. This book advances the discussion in many ways and should not be missed." *Charles Camosy* — Fordham University "The challenge of promoting values beyond Western-style individual autonomy — but avoiding top-down oppression — is both a puzzle for academics and a broad social problem with real-world consequences. This most welcome book leverages an

ancient and helpfully foreign concept — the biblical idea of covenant — to move beyond this paralyzing binary. The trajectory set by Marcia Pally, tightly argued and socially oriented, is one that many different kinds of people can and should support."Tsvi Blanchard — National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership "Marcia Pally'snbsp;Commonwealth and Covenantnbsp;asks one of the big questions of our time: What worldview is now needed for us to develop productive public policy? Pally grasps that what we need is not more economic theory but, rather, a full worldview. In addressing this fundamental and daunting task, she moves elegantly and authoritatively through modern intellectual history as well as Christian and Jewish theology. Marked by clear and graceful prose, this book is a must-read for those concerned about our economic and political future."Joel C. Hunter — Northland, a Church Distributed "Brilliant! In addition to its insightful lessons in history, philosophy, culture, government, psychology, and moral theology, this book contains a description of the virtue derived from the proper relationship between self and society. . . . This book is so helpful to me as a pastor because it affirms the basic theme that each person is a valuable creation of God, yet made for relationships."Amos Yong — Fuller Theological Seminary "Questions about 'the one' and 'the many' have persisted over millennia. Some in monotheistic traditions emphasize the former, to the exclusion of the latter; in reaction, philosophies and theologies of pluralism have emerged more recently exploring 'the many,' but they verge onto political anarchism and consumerist excess. Marcia Pally'snbsp;Commonwealth and Covenantnbsp;opens up a broad and generous middle way, one that is interdisciplinarily informed, historically rooted, philosophically robust, and theologically foundational. Any sustainable program for a common global future will need to heed and implement in some respect this relational vision."