The Goals of the Occupy Movement can Claim Roots and Shared Values in the Teachings of the World’s Great Religions:

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Remarks: Panel on the Occupy Movement sponsored by the Dutchess County Interfaith Council

I. Intro.
a. The Golden Rule...as a child, the Golden Rule was printed on my fat, black kindergarten pencils. Recite the English version with me. Who could ask for more along the line of equitable treatment? Read several other versions of The Golden Rule...
b. Connection with the D.C. Interfaith Council.
I was asked to Present some information on values which the various major religions share with the Occupy Movement. I recently heard Bill Moyers refer to “Moral Intersections.” The evening before I was called about this, I had moderated a panel at Vassar College on the insight of the various religions concerning the environment. I had sat at a table with a rabbi, an Episcopal priest, a Buddhist Nun, a Hindu doctor, a Native American leader and a Muslim Imam, each of whom spoke from the collected wisdom of their own tradition. When Mark Reinhardt called the following morning, I couldn’t resist.
c. However and unfortunately, I couldn’t bring all of my friends along this morning. So, I found the textbook which I had used while teaching a course on World Religions at Marist College. I remembered that it had included primary source material from a varied group of sacred texts I read through these texts and culled what I hope will be regarded as some helpful wisdom - some moral intersections with the goals of the Occupy Movement.

II. Here are just a few points from just a few of the writings of just a few major religions:
A. Hinduism....beginning with the most ancient of these religions, I was reminded of the great divide between the religions of India - Hinduism, Sikkism, Jainism and Buddhism and the Semitic Religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. That is, the difference in their attitude toward this life in this world. Hinduism and Buddhism regard this life as a dream of sorts, as an illusion which is to be cast aside for a higher existence (I realize that this is a generalization and as such has many inadequacies). However, this basic attitude toward this material life does not encourage emphasis on the social ethics of living this life. The Caste system, now outlawed by the government of India, but tolerated by Hinduism for thousands of years as a way of assigning a particular class of people to particular duties, is certainly not concerned about matters of equality - social, economic or political. And yet, there is Matatma Ghandhi, who most certainly was a leader in the struggle for the rights and well being of all people, including those who are poor. Of course, Ghandhi was also the key proponent of nonviolent direct action.

B. Buddhism - I heard a Buddhist monk speak this past week at a multi-religious Service. His teachings were about Loving Kindness and Compassion. In each case he taught that, beginning with those nearest to us and extending outward to include all sentient beings, we need to envision their happiness and well being........that, beginning with those nearest to us and extending outward to include all sentient beings, we need to envision the relief of their suffering. And, not just meditate on these things, but resolve to take action to spread happiness and to relieve suffering.

C. Judaism, the original of the Semitic religions, is a storehouse of ethical injunctions. The
stranger, the poor, the widows and the children are mentioned again and again as worthy of care and consideration. Social Justice is a major value pushed by the prophets, major and minor: seek justice, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow, share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house...decide with equity for the meek of the earth.....the righteous one is the one who despises the gain of oppressions. I liked what the rabbi on the Religion and the Environment panel had to say: “Do you have to be religious to be an environmentalist? Of course not, but religion can serve to hem us around with limits to our own selfish passions whether they be concerned with food or sabbath rest or greed.”

D. Islam - one of the five pillars of Islam is Charity - 1. the declaration of faith in the words of the Prophet Muhammad,
2. Prayer 5x a day 3. fasting during the month of Ramadan
4. pilgrimage to Mecca and 5. Charity. Sura 2 of the Koran reads: “Righteousness does not consist in whether you face towards the east or the west when you pray...but righteous is the one who for the love of Allah gives his wealth to his kinsfolk, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarers, and to the beggars.” And these injunctions come under threat of the fires of hell.

E. Christianity - this religion was, of course, the one in which Dr. King was rooted. I would just add a phrase which was drummed into me in seminary: “the preferential option for the poor.” The Christian Gospels and especially the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus story after Jesus story, emphasize the rights of the poor neighbor....The words “Love your neighbor as yourself” end what is called The Great Commandment and, what some Christians regard as the “final examination” to take place on judgment day, hinges on the question of whether or not you gave the hungry food, the thirsty drink, welcomed the stranger, visited the sick and those in prison....whenever you did this to the least of these my brothers and sisters, said Jesus, you did this to me.”

III. Conclusion:
When I visited Occupy Wall Street at Zuccotti Park in early October, I met a young woman in the portion of the park set aside as sacred space. She was reading the Tao De Ching (dao duh Jing )as translated by a man named Stephen Mitchell. I showed her my Book of Psalms also translated by Mitchell. Psalm 15 goes like this - I dedicate it to the hearts of the Occupiers and to the heart of our nation:
Lord, who can be trusted with power,
and who may act in your place?
Those with a passion for justice,
who speak the truth from their hearts;
who have let go of selfish interests
and grown beyond their own lives;
who see the wretched as their family
and the poor as their flesh and blood.
They alone are impartial
and worthy of the people’s trust.
Their compassion lights up the whole earth,
and their kindness endures forever.