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May 15, 2012: Religion at Occupy Wall Street

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5/15/2012—First of all, thank you readers for your patience while I graded exams. All done for the semester. I was going to write about the absence of religion at Occupy Wall Street and its related manifestations. That was to make a larger point about the lack of a religious component in the left's critique of capitalism (which is not really a critique at all, just criticism that tax policies and regulatory policies should be different). And all that was to make a larger point about the absence of spiritual/religious life on the left. Except that none of that may be true. You can find stories about religious services and religion at OWS. (Here is one from PBS) I don't know if the same was true at Occupy Pittsburgh, but it could have been. So it is back to the drawing boards. There is a message here, but I'm not yet sure what it is. Is OWS an exception to the general hostility to religion on the left? If so, it is a good starting point for a reconsideration of religion among secularists. And the story of religion at OWS may also tell more about the state of liberal religion in the 21st Century than anything else. For example, in the 60's there would have been a Catholic presence at an event like OWS. Has the American Catholic Church lost its economic vision? In the 60's, a movement like OWS would have touched off an economic debate within Protestantism. Has American Protestantism become too fractured to have any such debate today? Islam played a role at OWS. Obviously that is an important difference from the 60's. And Judaism, too. There was a large Kol Nidre service last fall. Throughout the Republican Presidential Primary campaign and the debates about Obamacare and religious exemptions, God has seemed the property of the Republican Party. And at least some on the left are ready to say good riddance, especially considering the positions of organized religion on abortion, gay marriage and now even contraception (although that is only the position of the leadership of the Catholic Church). But that is a mistake for two independent reasons. Obviously it is a political mistake given the religious nature of America. But it is much more a spiritual mistake. The truest saying in the Gospels is that man does not live by bread alone. There is more to reality than that.