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September 11, 2014: National Motto Fails in Allegheny County

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9/11/2014—Today is the anniversary of the attacks of 9/11/2001. I remember thinking at the time that the attacks would not change things that much. But in fact they have in two ways at least. First, we are still living with the fallout from the invasions that followed, in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Second, the American people are still going through a kind of anti-religion reaction—remember, the New Atheists emphasized religious wars as well as anti-scientific religious thought. Isis greatly reinforces this tendency. On the fallout front, President Obama gave a talk to the nation I could not bear to watch. I still cannot figure out why Isis is our problem. The group is not attacking America itself or even American installations and institutions. Iraq has plenty of military resources to defend itself—the issue is political. Sunnis have to feel they have a future there. We can't intervene in Syria because we don't want anybody there to win the civil war (anyone who has a remote chance to do so). On the anti-religion front, Allegheny County Council this week voted down a proposal to post the national motto, In God We Trust, in the courthouse. The typical themes emerged. Take a look at Aaron Auperlee's story in the Tribune Review. The liberal rabbi says religion is best kept private in our culture—but certainly it was not so in the Torah. And anyway, liberal Jews are always trotting out Jewish teachings on social welfare issues. The Catholic Bishop says God brings people together. But these kinds of votes just emphasize our differences, however they go. The President of the Islamic Center says no one should be offended—if they don't believe, they don't believe. The Buddhist says we are inner. The Hindu says God can be a dog—(and I am all for In Dog We Trust). The story mentions the 20% of Americans who do not identify with any organized religion, but not that many of them say they believe in God. My question in the story is, what is the point of such a posting? Is it political—God as a wedge issue? Usually. Is it cultural—to keep God in the game? But it doesn't. I'm waiting to hear my answer—to remind us that nihilism is not the only possibility. We believe that existence has meaning. God is much more than religion. Of course, that would fall on deaf ears today. But words can also be events.