

Why the Rise of Christian Nationalism

While the fundamental premises that Christian Nationalism is based upon are flawed, twisted, and egregiously wrong, the rise of this heinous thinking needs more careful analysis and understanding.

First, why is this happening to America?

Filling the Void of a Central Moral & Ethical Foundation

Today's modern society, especially revealed in our amoralistic political system, no longer seems to hold moral virtue as an admired character trait. With the fall-off of church attendance among the younger generation, teaching moral education seems to have waned, resulting in a cultural pluralism with no central core. This reflects a pattern that scholars of religion, sociology, and political culture have been documenting for more than three decades:

As distrust has increased in shared moral institutions, their central role in creating a common ethical standard has weakened. Our society has been losing a common moral vocabulary. Politics has entered the vacuum with amoral power-seeking rather than virtue-seeking.

Weakening of Shared Moral Anchors -- Why This Feels Especially Pronounced Today

Declining Shared Moral Institutions

Across multiple studies, the United States is undergoing a profound religious and cultural shift, described by analysts as “religious transformation” – its “political religion” that’s reshaping American politics and society. Several trends converge:

- Church attendance and religious affiliation are declining, especially among younger Americans.
- Nearly half of adults now rarely or never attend religious services, a dramatic change from previous generations. Only 2 in 5 Americans “trust” religion to give them guidance.
- The rise of the religiously unaffiliated (“the nones”) is reshaping political identity and moral formation.

Younger generations participate less in the institutions that once taught common virtues—churches, civic clubs, neighborhood associations, even public schools as moral-forming spaces. Without these, there is no widely shared framework for concepts like humility, compassion, or neighbor-love.

Fragmented Information Ecosystems

People no longer receive moral stories from the same sources. Instead, they encounter thousands of competing narratives, *many of which reward outrage, fear, and tribal loyalty.*

Identity Insecurity

When people feel culturally or economically unmoored, they often gravitate toward movements that promise clarity, belonging, and a sense of righteousness.

These shifts make it easier for political movements to adopt religious language and symbols. Institutions once responsible for teaching shared moral frameworks—churches, synagogues, civic associations, and our schools—no longer play the same unifying role. Minorities splinter the center.

How Moral Vacuums Create Space for Political Identity to take on Religious Weight

When a society loses a common moral core, *politics becomes the battleground arena where moral identity is contested* --a winner take all combat zone. Both the religious right and the progressive left deploy “**moral decline narratives**” to mobilize supporters, even as fewer Americans are rooted in traditional religious communities.

- **People still need meaning, belonging, and identity**, but traditional institutions that once provided clarity (churches, schools, civic groups, extended families) no longer play the same role.
- **Politics becomes the arena where people seek moral certainty**, because it offers clear “us vs. them” categories, and someone or something to blame for their own angst.
- **Religious symbols and language are repurposed**, giving political identity a sense of sacredness, moral superiority, or inevitability.
- **Communities under stress often turn to simplified “black and white” narratives** that promise purity protection, or restoration, overlooking the realities of cultural complexity and nuances of love.

This creates several increasingly dire consequences:

- **Politics becomes Artificially Inseminated with Moral Overtones**, but without a real ethical foundation.
- **Partisanship replaces Virtue and Strong Character** as the primary symbol of tribal identity.
- **Cultural Unity becomes fragmentation**, because there is no common story to bind people together.
- **Moral Language Becomes Weaponized**, used to attack opponents rather than cultivate character.
- **Political identity has become a substitute for Religious Identity** as religious leaders have violated their ethical standards of piety
- **Cultural Diversity** initiatives in schools has forced avoidance explicit moral teaching to respect diverse beliefs – moral relativism.¹
- **Individualism in modern culture** emphasizes self-expression over character formation to build community.

It’s a recurring human pattern: when shared moral formation weakens, political identity often fills the void. The decline of religious consensus has left a moral vacuum that politics is ill-equipped to fill. The result is a generation growing up with “*ethical intuition*” but *without “ethical formation.”*

*Virtue is no longer widely admired, because admiration requires a shared definition of what virtue is.
Declining shared moral frameworks and weak character-building triggers the erosion of democracy.*

***With No Trust, Moral Tribalism Prevails
as groups seek security within their shells, each blaming the other.***

This is a pattern that historians and sociologists have observed in many cultures; it’s a cultural and moral phenomenon, not just a partisan one; it happened in Germany in the 1930’s, and resulted in the Holocaust.

¹ **Moral Relativism** is the philosophical belief that moral judgments are not objectively true or universally applicable, but are instead relative to cultural, societal, or individual perspectives. It asserts that no single moral standard is superior to another, arguing that right and wrong vary across cultures and situations.

We are experiencing an “amoral political system”—not because people lack moral instincts – but because they’ve latched on to the demagoguery of authoritarian power as symbols of strength as our moral center collapses.

A Constructive Path Forward

Even in this fragmented landscape, there are openings for renewal:

- Many communities are experimenting with **nonreligious moral education**, focusing on empathy, responsibility, and civic virtue.
- Some scholars argue that **moral narratives can still unify**, even outside religious institutions, if they are rooted in shared human values.
- Faith communities that emphasize **hospitality, humility, and service** can offer a compelling alternative to political moralism.

From a cultural perspective—not a political one—we need to emphasize and elevate *the dignity of the human spirit* that centers on the “oneness” of human-kind – the great principles shared by all religious and cultures that have produced cultures throughout history. This include virtues and values like:

- humility
- mercy
- forgiveness
- truthfulness
- neighborly-love
- justice & fairness
- self-sacrifice
- service rather than power
- compassion rather than fear
- using differences as a source of innovation
- values that build trust

***When moral education weakens, people don’t become less moral
—they become morally unanchored.
And unanchored moral energy often attaches itself to the
loudest or most emotionally compelling divisive narrative available.***
