“Humanism” -- Cultures that place particular value on the distinctive personhood and dignity of all human beings; recognize the moral significance and responsibility of human actions; carefully encourage what is good and noble and discourage what is regrettable and destructive in humanity; and construct social institutions that reflect, respect, and enhance human life understood in such terms.

Not “Humanism” -- Non-humanist cultures see some human beings as dispensable; may value “humanity” collectively but at the expense of distinct persons; sacrifice the good of persons to the interests of the state or economy; violate human/civil rights with impunity.
Part I – FRAMING ASSUMPTIONS

1. Humanism is NOT the automatic, standard default position for human societies.
   • It is a major accomplishment.
   • It requires big cultural and moral work to achieve.

2. Much in ordinary experience seems to contradict humanist beliefs.
   • Empirically, people are often stupid, selfish, deceitful, petty, and ugly!
   • Many do not seem to deserve what humanism grants everyone.

3. Therefore, humanism is vulnerable—not secure, self-perpetuating, or permanent.
   • It can be degraded, corrupted, abandoned.
   • It cannot be taken for granted

4. In the long run, sustaining humanism requires a broadly compelling, coherent moral legitimation.
   • Humanism needs convincing justifications to withstand reasonable skepticism.

5. Historically, Judaism and Christianity were major cultural wellsprings of humanism.
   • Imago Dei, Exodus, Prophets, Incarnation, agape – these offer transcendent justifications.
   • But both have often failed to live up to own ideals.

6. In the shorter run, “groundless” humanism can survive on institutional inertia and historically accumulated “collective moral capital” saved up in a culture’s “moral bank account.”
   • Does this undergo a “cultural lag effect,” generational change, illusion of permanence?

7. Secular humanism is a desacralized version of Jewish/Christian-rooted humanism.
   • It is based on Enlightenment reactions against real failures of Christendom.
   • It reflects Christian ethics without Christian theology.

8. It is doubtful that secular humanism, lacking a transcendent ontological justification, can sustain robust humanism indefinitely.
   • Empirical facts about actual humans (stupid, selfish, etc.) are too clear to the contrary.
9. Catholic Social Teachings offer the strongest, clearest, most coherent justification for Christian humanism available.

- Evangelical, mainline, liberal Protestantism do not compare.

10. CONCLUSION: Sustaining robust humanism in the long run (think: 2-3 generations from now) will depend in part on sustaining its robust justifications in Judaism and Christianity, especially Catholicism.

Part II – AMERICAN CATHOLICISM FALTERING

Numerous signs of weakening Catholicism in the U.S.—especially among youth—raise concerns about American Catholicism’s future.

1. Weak Commitment and Disaffiliation of Many Youth
2. Declining Mass Attendance
3. Little Catholic Age-Driven “Bounce Back” Effect

Catholic youth exit their teenage years the sociologically weakest among U.S. Christian faiths.

| Table 6. Religious Service Attendance of U.S. Adolescents, Ages 13–17 (Percentages) |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Religious service attendance                  | U.S.     | CP       | MP       | BP       | RC       | J        | LDS      | NR       |
| More than once a week                          | 16       | 29       | 13       | 24       | 6        | ~        | 28       | ~        |
| Once a week                                    | 24       | 26       | 31       | 17       | 34       | 8        | 43       | ~        |
| 2–3 times a month                              | 12       | 15       | 16       | 18       | 12       | 10       | 5        | ~        |
| Once a month                                   | 7        | 7        | 9        | 4        | 8        | 11       | 6        | ~        |
| Many times a year                              | 8        | 7        | 10       | 19       | 8        | 13       | 6        | 1        |
| A few times a year                             | 14       | 13       | 12       | 11       | 21       | 36       | 8        | 4        |
| Never                                         | 18       | 4        | 9        | 7        | 11       | 22       | 4        | 95       |

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding and unreported don’t know and refused answers; cells of <1 are reported as ~.
Catholic youth decline religiously from teenage to college-age years more than non-Catholic youth

Figure 5.3: Religious Trajectories among Catholic and Non-Catholic Youth (N = 2,432) [Weighted]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of religious faith shaping daily life</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Religious Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important at all</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How close teen feels to God</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Religious Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely close</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very close</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat close</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat distant</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very distant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely distant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in God</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding and unreported don’t know and refused answers; cells
Six Major Religious Types of Emerging Adults (all U.S.):

1. Committed Traditionalists (15%)  
2. Selective Adherents (30%)  
   (includes a disproportionately high % of Catholics)
3. Spiritually Open (15%)
4. Religiously Indifferent (25%)  
   (includes a disproportionately high % of Catholics)
5. Religiously Disconnected (5%)
6. Irreligious (10%)

Ex-Catholic Non-Religious Americans:

- The recent sharp rise in the percent of Americans identifying as “not religious” is driven mostly by higher percentages of young people (disproportionately Catholic) defecting from religion.
"Not Religious": All Adult Americans

Figure 1. Percentage with No Religious Preference, by Year: Persons 25 to 74 Years Old, Born 1900 to 1974, GSS, 1973 to 2000

Note: Observed data are smoothed by a spline function hinged at 1991 (τ = .099). Cases missing data on religious origins, age, marital status, parenthood, or education are excluded; N = 31,678.


Recent Trends in Affiliation, by Generation

% of each age cohort that is unaffiliated

Source: Aggregated data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2007-2012.
Catholic youth contributed to nearly one-half of the growth in non-religious youth over 5 years between 2003 and 2008 (a double effect for their 24% size).

- Such attrition is masked, however, by ongoing replacement by new immigrant Catholics—but likely not to last?
Percentage of Catholic and Protestant Adults (All) Attending Religious Services
“Nearly Every Week or More” by Year, 1972-2008

Conclusion: Protestant attendance stable, Catholic drastically declined

Percentage of Catholics and Protestants Attending Religious Worship Services
“About Once a Week or More” by Age, 15-26 (2000s)

Conclusion: Catholics teens and emerging adults attend church less and decline more than Protestant youth
Percentage of Catholics and Protestants Attending Religious Worship Services
“Nearly Every Week or More” by Age (2000s)

Conclusion: Catholic church attendance more differentiated by age than Protestant

Percentage of Protestants Attending Religious Worship Services
“Nearly Every Week or More” by Age and Birth Cohort Decade

Conclusion: Protestants from different eras tend to increase church attendance as they age
Percentage of Catholics Attending Religious Worship Services
“Nearly Every Week or More” by Age and Birth Cohort Decade

Part II SUMMARY:
Signs of weakening Catholicism in the U.S.—especially among youth—raise concerns about American Catholicism’s future ... with probable long-term negative implications for humanism.

Q: Why? How do we explain all this?

There are explanations.

But I don’t have time here to explicate them 😊

So you’ll have to read my books 😊
Part III – IMPLICATIONS FOR CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION?

Q: What does all this mean for Catholic Colleges and Universities, like DeSales?

Causes: not colleges but lack of good formation before college.

No easy answers.

Massive challenges.

Uncertain future.

BUT...

   • Make a difference by BEING DIFFERENT.
   • American higher education is in a semi-crisis, needing not conformity but principled and visionary alternatives models.

2. Do NOT assume that most college students are asking “the big questions” or exploring faith. They must be prodded and challenged by a comprehensive institutional intellectual culture.
   • Few are working on “God, life, and the world.”
   • Individual programs and faculty will not make a dent; what is needed are college-wide cultures of big-question inquiry that begins at the top and works down.

   • Catholic Social Doctrines are not secondary or optional.
   • Catholic Social Doctrines are essential to faithful Catholic belief and practice.

4. Hit Students Up with the Best of Catholic Thinking and Liturgy—Surprise Them into Seriously Reconsidering the Catholic Tradition.
   • Many Catholic college students come from mediocre parishes with lame homiletics, bad catechesis, and little sense of the riches of their tradition intellectually and liturgically.
   • Show them the “treasures hidden in the family mansion.”
5. Focus on the Compatibility of Reason & Revelation, of Science & Faith.

• A majority of Catholic youth believe (wrongly) that religion and science are incompatible.
• Work intentionally to break down the erroneous “inevitable warfare of science and religion” narrative.
• Take on the epistemological issues of reasonable faith and graduate better-informed students.

6. Work to Redefine “Strong Faith”

WHY ... because of the Problematic Background Assumption that Strong Faith = Conflict/Violence

• Youth today have learned that strength and confidence in faith and belief in particular truths are inevitably linked with offending others, conflict, and violence.
• Major cultural and institutional forces are at work to privatize and “moderate” religious faith (e.g., public school dynamics).
• Youth see few models of constructive disagreement among adults.

“Strong Faith” =

• Convicted, but civil, hospitable, capable of a good, constructive argument
• Committed, but interested in reasonable, rigorous, fun conversations
• Serious, but not rigid, reactionary
• Caring about the right ideas, truth, but invested in reciprocity, learning, persuasion
• Smartly critical of “the world,” but also appreciative of the good in it and loving of God’s creation

7. Integrate big, normative, theological questions and discussions into the standard academic curriculum.

• Break down the standard compartmentalization between:
  (a) religion, humanism, faith, theology, morality, goodness, truth, beauty, the Summun Bonum
  (b) science, academics, disciplinary research, methodology, analysis, etc.

SUMMARY: Use the college experience to strategically destabilize students’ taken-for-granted, often ill-informed and problematic assumptions and categories, and then reconstruct them to be more authentically Catholic.