Theologian gives four steps to renew culture of faith

Rebuilding Catholic Culture: How the Catechism Can Shape Our Common Life
By Ryan N.S. Topping
Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2012

Book Review

By C.S. Morrissey

Ryan Topping, who has already published two books on St. Augustine and one on Plato, has a terrific new book, **Rebuilding Catholic Culture: How the Catechism Can Shape Our Common Life.** Topping is a native of Saskatoon, but he earned his degrees in theology from Oxford University. Topping keeps busy, married with six children, and teaching as a Fellow of the Thomas More College of Liberal Arts in New Hampshire.
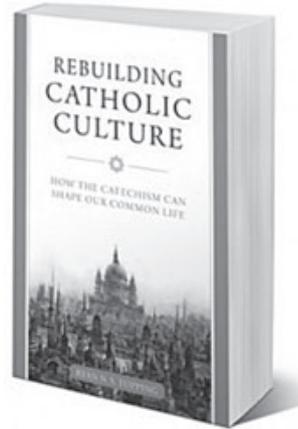
In his new book, Topping expends some effort noting the dissolution of Catholic culture. But he ends the book with a solution, recommending four practical steps for the renewal of culture. The fight for Catholic culture, he says, must focus on: (1) hospital, (2) family, (3) school, and (4) church:

1. We Catholics must end abortion. Ryan argues that abortion should not be seen as "an evil equivalent to unfair immigration rules" or equivalent to any other pet social justice cause. "Neither war, nor the death penalty, nor open-pit mining are intrinsically evil acts, even though they might under certain conditions become evil," he writes. "The only act of prudence that Catholics need to apply to the question of abortion is how to eliminate the practice."

Justice and the entire social order depend on this, because no other right is safe if the right to life is denied. Abortion is an indefensible moral evil, the very nexus of the culture of death. The solemn duty of Catholics is to do everything in their power to stop it.

2. We Catholics must have more children. Not only do Catholics need to defend and protect children from the moment of conception, they also need to have much more of them, and then proceed to school them better.

3. We Catholics must teach our children Latin. "Teaching Latin is simply the most convenient way to instill memory and to begin to train a mind to think," writes Topping. Catholic parents have to assume responsibility for the education of their children in everything "noble and fine in the Catholic tradition of literature, history, and philosophy." In addition to Latin's proven utility in developing mental excellence, Latin is also of prime importance as a symbol of all of Western civilization's excellent literature, history, and philosophy.

4. We Catholics must build better churches. In conclusion, Topping warns that "activism and education – necessary as these are – will lose their way if not guided and nourished by a rich liturgical experience.

Catholics have to remember how to build beautiful churches and learn again the habits of good manners once we step inside them." Topping sees that the liturgy has, more often than not, been stripped of dignity, elegance, devotion, and beauty.

Topping therefore emphasizes the importance of beauty in Catholic life: "The gospel is not only true; it is also beautiful," he writes. "The recovery of beauty as a theological category has been one of the singular gains in Catholic thought" in recent times, he notes.

Pope Benedict XVI himself said in 2009: "Authentic beauty unlocks the yearning of the human heart, the profound desire to know, to love, to go towards the Oth-

er, to reach for the Beyond."

This fine book discusses fittingly how Catholics can use the *Catechism* to enrich their understanding and experience of the creed, the sacraments, and the liturgy. In its pages, rich discussions of character, conscience, and law are also to be found. Most of all, Ryan Topping edifies and inspires, as he brings his own experience of family life to his discussions of how love grows in the family, and of the key role of prayer. Of the family, he writes truly: "There is no better way to learn how to love."

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