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Pope Benedict XVI, ed. Brown's "A Reason Open to God: On Universities, Education & Culture" (Book Review)

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A Reason Open to God: On Universities, Education & Culture,

by Pope Benedict XVI, edited by J. Steven Brown. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013. 313 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 9780813221472

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In this work, J. Steven Brown has assembled numerous writings and speeches of Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) on the nature of Christian higher education and the broader questions of the relationship between faith and the intellectual life. As a former university professor of theology, Benedict is keenly aware of the challenges facing Christian university educators in the 21st century. He hopes to address what he calls the “educational emergency” that has arisen due to the failures of modernity and postmodernity (p. 3). On the one hand, modernity, with its self-limitation of reason to the hard sciences and math (i.e., empiricism), has failed to acknowledge the rationality of metaphysics and questions of faith, and has thereby displaced a significant avenue to the discovery of truth. On the other hand, postmodernity, with its skepticism of objectivity, has relegated questions of meaning, value, and ethics to mere opinion. The answer to these challenges, Benedict insists, is to be found in the nature of God as rational, true, just, and the doctrine of the *logos*, which insists that Christ is the incarnation of reason itself. In addition to these theological-philosophical reflections, Benedict also admonishes professors/teachers to model Christian piety for the students, since the search for truth is at the heart a search for a loving relationship with God: “We are...committed to teaching the faith and making it credible to human reason. And we do this not simply by our teaching, but by the way we live our faith and embody it, just as the Word took flesh and dwelt among us” (pp. 38-39). He goes on to note that education is not only about the presentation of content, but also about spiritual formation, and thus encourages teachers to love students and to “awaken their innate thirst for truth and their yearning for transcendence” (p. 39).

One deficiency is to be expected for a work of this nature. Since it is a collection of his speeches, bulletins, and other communiqués on several related topics, there is often significant overlap in the ideas, arguments, and presentations. This can make for more difficult reading, but the patient reader will benefit from perseverance because of the richness of the ideas and arguments offered, because it can serve to reinforce the point(s) Benedict hopes to make, and because it helps to more clearly identify those issues that are closest to Benedict’s heart. The value of the work as a sourcebook of this pastor-theologian’s thoughts on Christian higher education cannot be overstated for those interested in Christian educational theory, and in particular for those interested in Catholic higher education in the 21st century. As such, this work is best suited for those studying educational theory at the university level or higher.