



REFORMED  
INSTITUTE of  
METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON

## ***LOOKING FOR A BOOK TO READ THIS SUMMER?***

**The selections are not exactly beach reading, but this year the Reformed Institute recommends...**

*Appelgate, Debby.* *The Most Famous Man in America.*  
(Doubleday, 2006)

Henry Ward Beecher was the son of Lyman Beecher, one of the great figures in development of Reformed Christianity in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; he was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe. As the pastor of a 3,000 member church in Brooklyn, New York, he himself was an important figure in both church affairs and public life in the Civil War era and its aftermath. A celebrity in his day, Beecher is best known today for three things: 1) staunch advocacy of various progressive social causes (including the abolition of slavery); 2) a liberalization of the Calvinist heritage he inherited from

his father's generation to make the pursuit of worldly happiness theologically respectable; and 3) a relationship with a female parishioner that caused him to be brought to trial on grounds of adultery. This book tells the story of his most eventful life in a thoughtful and quite entertaining way. In places it reads like a novel.

*Dentiere, Marie.* *Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre & Preface to a Sermon by John Calvin*  
(Chicago 2004)

Marie Dentiere was a French noblewoman who in the 1520's left the convent she had joined to work for religious reform. She married a former priest, and they found their way to Geneva, where she was active in the movement to bring about reformation of the church there. Her epistle to Marguerite de Navarre, written in 1539, shortly after Calvin had come to Geneva, was the first explicit statement of Reformed theology by a woman to appear in French. It is clearly the work of a person who grasped the theological issues at stake in the Reformation well and could express herself eloquently.

*De Gruchy, John W.* *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (Fortress, 2006)

The author of this book is a well-known South African Reformed theologian who played an active role in the struggle against apartheid. He is also known as a thoughtful interpreter of the ideas of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred

for his role in the struggle against Nazism. In this latest work De Gruchy talks movingly about his own life while at the same time discussing some of the basic issues of Christian theology. In that respect (as well as the clarity with which the author expresses himself) the book is reminiscent of N.T. Wright's Simply Christian. It is a good place to start if one has never read any theology before. De Gruchy is slated to speak at an "occasional event" of the Reformed Institute in November of this year.

*Mouw, Richard J. Praying at Burger King (Eerdman's, 2007)*

Many people in the church today claim to be interested in bringing the Gospel creatively to bear on the issues raised by our popular culture. But the number of people who actually can do it at all effectively is not large. Mouw, who currently serves as the President of Fuller Theological Seminary, is one of those people, and he also happens to be one of the more knowledgeable interpreters of Reformed Christianity available today. In this book, which is a series of short "op-ed" length pieces, he discusses such down-to-earth matters as praying in public places, celebrating Halloween, animal rights, and patriotism. This is theological reflection in bite-sized form, and often it provides much food for thought. An easy, fun read.

*Prothero, Stephen. Religious Literacy—What Every American Needs To Know—and Doesn't (HarperSanFrancisco, 2007)*

If attendance at religious services and membership in faith communities are any guide, Americans are one of the most religious peoples in the world—much more so than Europeans. Yet Americans today (in contrast to past years) tend to be religious illiterates and to have much less knowledge about religious matters (including the content of the faiths they themselves espouse) than Europeans. How can this be? And what difference does it make? The author of this book, who teaches religion at Boston University, seeks to answer these questions, arguing that in this day and age it is actually dangerous for the citizens of a democracy to be ignorant about matters of faith. He also has a provocative recommendation—pertaining to the content of public education--about how this problem should be addressed.

*Wolterstorff, Nicholas. Lament for a Son (Eerdman's, 1987)*

The author of this book, who taught for many years at Calvin College and then later at Yale Divinity School, is well known as a Christian philosopher. The book is a set of meditations on the subject of grief that were occasioned by the tragic death of his son in a mountain-climbing accident. It is a beautifully written, thought-provoking treatment of the kind of life experience that almost demands theological reflection for anyone who is a believer. Wolterstorff is scheduled to be the featured speaker at the next convocation (2008) of the Reformed Institute.