

Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007). Pp. 142. Reviewed by Morris McDonald.

Lawson writes,

The preacher must speak, Calvin said, “in a way that shows he is not pretending.” This Calvin did—he was blood-earnest in his preaching. Listen to him exhort his congregation: “Moreover, let us learn that God does not intend there to be churches as places for people to make merry and laugh in, as if a comedy were being acted there. But there must be majesty in His Word, by which we may be moved and affected” (p. 124).

The Mobile, Alabama, minister has done a worthy service for pastors in this unique examination of John Calvin the preacher. “The goal here,” Lawson urges, “is not to take a sentimental journey—the hour is too desperate for such a triviality. Rather the aim of this book is to raise the bar for a new generation of expositors” (p. xiii).

Pages 1-19 are biographical, to acquaint the reader with the life of Calvin. Then the author steps into the world of the Geneva pulpit in the mid-sixteenth century. He asks, “What were the hallmarks that made his preaching so successful?” (p. 24). Calvin wrote (*Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, 1:95), “The office of teaching is committed to pastors for no other purpose than that God alone may be heard there” (p. 29).

Seven chapters (Approaching the Pulpit, Preparing the Preacher, Launching the Sermon, Expounding the Text, Crafting the Delivery, Applying the Truth and Concluding the Exposition) become the setting for 32 specifics of the expository genius of John Calvin. Lawson does a masterful job of identifying and illustrating each of these points from the writings of the pastor at St. Pierre. If I were to follow my own advice, I would retrieve this volume and re-read it annually.

As Calvin concluded each sermon [he preached some 4000 sermons], Lawson notes, “like a skilled attorney making his closing appeal before a jury, the Genevan expositor pressed his biblical text to his congregation’s souls, calling for a verdict—a decision that would honor God” (p. 120).