MacGowan was not through his ample demonstration that the very existence of a Holy Scripture rests upon and presupposes divine communication, first within the Godhead, and second from God to humans. Ward’s conclusion is that it is best to consider the origination and preservation of the Bible in close conjunction with God’s existence and attributes. God’s communications to humans have not been delivered all at once, but at various times and in different manners (Heb. 1:1, 2) and culminating in the incarnation of the Son of God. But Scripture and the possibility of our knowing the God who made us are inseparably linked.

Second, in one of the more interesting segments of the book (chapter 4), Ward gives close attention to the descriptors evangelical thinkers have long employed in describing the effect of inspiration by the Holy Spirit upon the writers: plenary and verbal. While Ward might more effectively have traced the history of these conceptions from the Reformation forward, he is on target in demonstrating that the first term has sought to emphasize the Spirit’s superintendence of the “whole” of the unit of Scripture, whereas the second has meant to emphasize that this superintendence extended to the choice of the individual words of Scripture. I applaud Ward’s cautions about an uncritical employment of the second approach, cautions in which he draws on translation theory which recognizes the sentence or the idiom as the unit of meaning rather than the individual word. While these are not confessional terms, and we are at liberty to use either or neither of them, we need to recognize that they are gaining fresh currency through their employment by such admirable organizations as the Gospel Coalition. Ward’s cautions here may be timely for our newly-resurgent Reformed evangelical movement in North America.

There is nothing “fusty” or “retro” about Ward’s book. Here is an admirable readiness to build on the best insights of a Turretin, a Bavinck, a Warfield, and a Packer in going on to speak to our contemporary scene regarding the Bible as reliable divine communication to a needy world. Has it blind spots? One could not detect, in reading it, that contemporary discussions of biblical inspiration are moving to encompass the difficult question of the divine superintendence of inspired texts between first deliverance and their finding final canonical form. I think it could also be observed that Ward is relatively disinterested in the whole field of what, across the twentieth century, have been called the “phenomena” of Scripture, i.e., items and occurrences in the Bible which do not seem to comport with Warfield’s dictum that “what Scripture says, God says.” Have we noticed, for example, that the speeches of Job’s friends are repudiated by God, rather than authorized by Him (Job 42:7)? No doubt Ward is aware of such “phenomena”; but it does not seem as though they have been sufficiently factored in to his framing of matters. God “takes responsibility” for everything in our Bibles, while being at liberty to point out where human agents go wandering. Of course, he does this rarely.

Who is likely to read Ward? In honesty, the book is a more extended treatment of its themes than practicable for an assigned text in most theology survey courses. But it certainly stands ready to assist those who teach those courses and those students whose essay-writing projects require fresh resources. Here is a winsome book, a lucid book, a consolidative book!

Kenneth J. Stewart
Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College


Sometimes while reflecting on a book, a word comes to mind that aptly characterizes the volume at hand. In the case of Timothy Ward’s Words of Life, the operative word is “consolidative.” Ward, an evangelical Anglican rector who completed PhD studies under Kevin Vanhoozer, here provides a contemporary articulation of a robustly evangelical doctrine of Scripture, one which gathers together some especially worthy observations on literature dealing with the origination of the Bible in the period since 1958. That was the year that J. I. Packer’s little classic Fundamentalism and the Word of God was released. Packer’s book, some will recall, was a re-articulation of the classical Reformed and evangelical doctrine of Scripture in the light of taunts and challenges thrown up by persons who then perceived the evangelical movement to be once more “spreading its wings” (signaled, in part, by the aggressive trans-Atlantic preaching of Billy Graham). Today’s situation is certainly very different from the one in which Packer put pen to paper a half-century ago. Not only has the academic theology of Europe’s university faculties and major American divinity schools continued to advance malnourished conceptions of Scripture and its authority, but much broadly evangelical writing about the origination of Scripture and the way its authority functions has demonstrated the “gravitational pull” of the modes of thought coined in those very academies. Thus, Ward kindly and firmly assesses such broadly evangelical modern writers as William Abraham and John Webster, finding their contemporary writings on Scripture to be interesting, but not entirely satisfactory.

Yet to stop here would be to imply that Ward writes with a “fortress mentality,” which he certainly does not. Ward is no mere defender of the “status quo”; he makes plain that evangelical conceptions of the Bible are capable of being improved upon. Two examples will help us grasp the fine balance he has struck between writing in defense of evangelical conviction about the Bible and bringing our convictions into still-closer conformity with Scripture itself. First, he early on takes up the question of the “place” or “rank” which ought to be given to a consideration of the origination of the Bible. He acknowledges (in his first two chapters) that while hostile circumstances may require us to treat the origin and preservation of the Scriptures as a separate and preliminary doctrinal matter (in advance of all other doctrines), this is neither ideal nor desirable. We have seen this argument before—for example in A. T. B. MacGowan’s volume The Divine Authenticity of Scripture (2007). Yet Ward is persuasive to a degree that