The author begins with the argument that the gnostics constructed "their own myth of origins in reaction to contemporary Jewish persecution, a myth which in its several variants was influenced by Johannine and Valentinian ideas and then underwent a 'Sethian' reinterpretation, largely in response to 'orthodox' Christian criticism" (p. xx). The second chapter studies the character of this myth, traces its series of redactions and analyzes its relationship "to a whole series of Gnostic texts and systems from the late 1st to the late 3rd century CE" (p. xxi). The remaining six chapters support the above points through a detailed analysis of theogony, cosmogony, anthropogony, anthropology, soteriology and eschatology in the primary sources. An appendix discusses "the etymologies of Barbelo, the illuminators and Adamas." The author includes a bibliography and indices of names and ancient sources but no summary or conclusion.

The following comments address the author's arguments concerning gnostic origins and development. With regard to the former, Logan tries to answer one question (gnostic origins) with another (whether gnosticism of a later date can be traced directly to Judaism). He seems to think that because the Sethian myth reflects views distinct from Judaism, gnosticism could have only arisen in reaction to Christianity. Identifying a distinct mode of thought at one point in gnostic history (and, according to Logan, this is late), however, says nothing to the question of the possible borrowing of Jewish ideas in an earlier, less developed period. The various Christian influences are, of course, important, but here too caution is in order. Making comparisons can be a more complicated task than the author seems willing to admit.

Logan's explanation of how gnostic thought developed over time also rests on two dubious points. (1) A weak argument (pp. 1–13) supports the thesis that Irenaeus offered a rather complete and unbiased account of gnostic sects and the "Christian Gnostic myth of Father, Mother and Son" as known to him around AD 180. (2) Against Pëtrement's claim that Irenaeus knew the Apocryphon, Logan argues that the type of gnosticism described in Adv. haer. 1.29 "underwent progressive development including 'Sethianization', until it emerged in the latest form of the Apocryphon, the long recension" (p. xx). This rather complex theory of development in four stages (cf. the elaborate diagram, p. 55) from the group(s) described by the hostile Irenaeus to the more detailed Apocryphon of James lacks substantial confirmation in the primary sources.

As a study of a certain myth and its relation to ritual, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy* will interest some specialists and probably be acquired by larger theological libraries. Logan's other theses should be read with care and compared with the studies of the scholars mentioned above. In light of the fact that Michael Allen Williams has recently argued that no ancient self-definition supports the modernist construct "gnosticism" (*Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, 1996), debates over classifying and interpreting these sources will undoubtedly continue for some time.

James A. Kelhoër
The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL


This is "a critical reconstruction of the hermeneutics" of Childs, as the subtitle tells us—i.e. Noble is not simply attempting to summarize the principal contributions
of Childs and evaluate them but is reconstructing the underlying hermeneutic that shapes Childs' work and then evaluating it and in some ways reconstituting it. There have been earlier attempts at evaluative criticism of Childs (works by James Barr, John Barton and Mark Brett, as well as many briefer contributions), but this is by far the most comprehensive and penetrating.

Barr faults Childs for side-stepping the power and implications of the historical-critical method and charges that he is in danger of losing historical truth; Barton assesses Childs from a largely literary point of view, examining what it means to read the entire text as a whole when the entire text is the canon; and Brett, deploying in part categories developed in the field of cultural anthropology, consistently attempts to shove Childs toward the pluralistic framework that lies at the heart of his own agenda. By contrast, Noble makes a valiant effort to understand and expound Childs on Childs' terms before offering some suggestions as to how he thinks Childs' program might be improved.

After an introductory chapter that lightly surveys earlier treatments of Childs, Noble devotes two long chapters to an analysis of Childs' canonical method as it has developed over the last thirty years. This period covers the work from Childs' seminal article, “Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary” (Int 18 [1964] 432–449), through his introductions, commentaries and numerous articles, down to his Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible (1992). These two chapters argue that several “methodological tensions” mark Childs' work from the beginning, in particular tensions between faith and reason, between the descriptive task and the normative/constructive task, between the original context of a text and the canonical context. These tensions, Noble argues, continue in the crowning volume (Biblical Theology) and mean that this work therefore falls somewhat short of Childs' own goals.

For instance, Childs repeatedly tells us that the OT bears witness to Christ. Yet on many occasions it is difficult to see precisely what it is that authorizes this claim. Childs often draws attention to God's suffering-redemptive involvement with humanity, or (to take a concrete text that Childs treats) more precisely to Yahweh's suffering-redemptive involvement with Israel (Isa 63:9). But Noble points out, it is one thing to grasp this divine involvement with human beings and another thing “to claim that Yahweh's suffering-redemptive involvement with humanity took the specific form of him becoming incarnate in Jesus” (p. 75), and yet another to claim that the former is an adumbration of the latter or in some sense a prior and prophetic witness to it. The canonical presupposition doubtless helps, but in itself that might warrant the second step but not (by itself) the third. So how is the conclusion that Isa 63:9 is a prior witness to Christ and his sufferings anything more than a Christianizing gloss?

In the next three chapters, Noble examines these “methodological tensions,” probing and exploring, making suggestions: “Reference, Fact, and Interpretation” (chap. 4), “Historical Methodology” (chap. 5) and “Traditions and the Final Form” (chap. 6). These reflections go beyond what Childs has said in print. There is too little space to convey the plethora of points Noble offers, but a couple of examples will not go amiss. Noble constantly returns to Childs' persistent “decoupling” of a text's theological value from its historical veracity. If one must choose between semantic understanding of what a text means and genetic understanding (the latter explains the text by appealing to its [reconstructed] history), Childs prefers the former.

This does not mean that Childs rejects mainstream critical opinions. Far from it: He not only adopts them but feels he must delineate the theological value that emerges from such positions. Thus Childs emphasizes Moses' canonical (as opposed to historical) authorship of the law and its relation to the authority of the law. The attribution
of the law to Moses was not (in the modern sense) an historical judgment at all, nor was the law authoritative because Moses wrote it (for after all in Childs' view Moses did not do so). Rather, the attribution to Moses was one of the ways at the community's disposal to affirm the authority of the law that was already accepted as authoritative within the community.

But Noble points out that there are considerable problems with this attempt to separate theology from the ostensible history. First, if Moses were in fact the author of the law, this would in fact justify, in the context of Sinai and God's self-disclosure on the mountain, the law's claim to be authoritative. Some of the laws, after all, can scarcely be thought to be intrinsically authoritative. Thus the question of Mosaic authorship is historically relevant to the theological questions. More importantly, when Childs defends the theological relevance of the (late) Deuteronomistic history to the history of the divided kingdom, he is saying in effect that although the Deuteronomist's evaluations of Israel's kings are doubtless historically anachronistic and retrospective, they are nonetheless legitimate within canonical norms (in much the same way that assessment of the Nazis must be in some measure retrospective and not dependent solely on the documents produced by the Nazis themselves). But if God had not prohibited intermarriage with foreigners before Solomon's many marriages, why should he have been condemned for entering into them—which is certainly what the Deuteronomist presents as having happened? After presenting a number of such problems, Noble concludes: “Once Mosaic historical authorship is rejected it has to be asked how Israel's law did in fact develop; . . . our assessment of the canonical theologies is dependent upon the historical answers we find to this question. . . . [I]f the bulk of this legal material had its origins in the last years of the monarchy then much of the Deuteronomistic theology would surely be no more than a radical misinterpretation of Israel's history. In the case of Mosaic authorship, then, theology and historical referentiality cannot be decoupled—one cannot regard the law, for theological purposes, as having been given by Moses while also admitting that in fact it was not” (p. 88).

The next three chapters expand the hermeneutical discussion to treatments of authorial intention, reader-response hermeneutics and various other aspects of philosophical hermeneutics (including Schleiermacher's “convergent circle” and Gadamer's antiobjectivism). Noble argues, against Gadamer, for objective meaning and also for a Hirschian distinction between meaning and significance and, further, that for Childs' program to be methodologically sound it must be tied to objectivist hermeneutics. This discussion covers a lot of now familiar ground and is not particularly percipient. Noble's primary criticism of any strong and consistent form of antiobjectivist hermeneutic is the old argument that it is necessarily self-defeating, for the thesis itself must fall under the same axe. Far more subtle and telling critiques are available.

The tenth chapter is a brief discussion of the illumination of the Spirit. Childs says that Calvin's treatment of the subject is so magisterial that further discussion by him is not necessary: He merely (and usually cryptically) adopts some elements of Calvin's view. Noble therefore expounds Calvin's view and wonders if Childs is really willing to pay the theological price of adopting Calvin's views of the matter, since those views are tightly tied to other doctrines to which Childs seems unwilling to commit himself.

In the eleventh chapter, Noble evaluates Childs' “canonical exegesis” and finds it wanting. It is frequently unclear, from Childs' discussion, whether the Christological interpretations of OT passages that he advances are properly regarded as the true and proper witness of the OT to the Christ of the NT (as he claims) or are anachronistically imposing on OT texts meanings that are essentially alien to such texts. Noble himself suggests that some of the problems could be resolved by greater resort to
typological exegesis. The final chapter finds Noble reconstructing Childs' program so as to preserve the best of it, while integrating more typological exegesis and more of the implications of belief in a divine author working behind and through the human authors.

The work is well written and, considering the difficulty of the subject, admirably clear and easy to follow. In substance, Noble is more critical of Childs than his courteous tone and evident sympathy might suggest. My occasional hesitations—e.g. the treatment of reader-response theory is remarkably thin; the treatment of typology, though surely along the right lines, is too brief and too narrow to support the weight that Noble wants to rest on it—cannot detract from the importance and good sense of this work.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL


Despite a rather broad title, the scope of this little book is quite narrow. It is a description of the fall of the American Biblical-theology movement. This, however, is no ordinary, humdrum retelling of an old tale. Pencansky is a postmodernist. He is suspicious of all human motives and interpretations. Accordingly, he proposes to describe the political motives behind the downfall of the movement. It is an exposition of a "power play, an effort to drive out the ruling priests of the academic world" motivated by "absolute hatred of and disappointment in the promise of the Biblical theology Movement" (pp. 4–5).

It is difficult to conduct meaningful discourse with those who deny the possibility of meaningful discourse. Nevertheless, if we pretend for the moment that we can make sense with our words, there are two lines of inquiry through which we can interact with Penchansky's thesis. First, we can address the method Penchansky uses to approach his topic. Second, we can address the degree to which he has demonstrated an accurate understanding of the particulars of the subject.

Penchansky is clear about his commitments. He utilizes four postmodern interpretative "keys" to explore the Biblical-theology movement. First, he revels in contradiction. According to the author "contradictions inher at the very heart of all things" (p. 12). Second, he accepts no methodological or linguistic center in interpretation. That is, nothing is verifiable or falsifiable. Third, "all readings are political" (p. 13), either consciously or unconsciously. Fourth, all attempts to organize ideas or phenomena in bipolar structures (e.g. substance and essence, sign and signified, text and reader) are unacceptable. One cannot properly call this a "method" as such. Rather, it is a set of values that the author believes exist at the heart of all that is human and that he tries to reveal in the writings of the Biblical-theology movement and its opponents.

The obvious absurdity of such a position, which has been pointed out many times, is this: If we claim that everyone unavoidably approaches and writes texts from preconceived and (more importantly) all-pervasive ideological positions, we also claim that one's ideology is static. By definition, it denies the malleability of the reader and asserts, exclusively, the malleability of the text. The ideologies of the text and the reader cannot converge. In this sense (to use a postmodern buzz word) texts have no "power" to affect and mold the thoughts and loyalties of the reader.