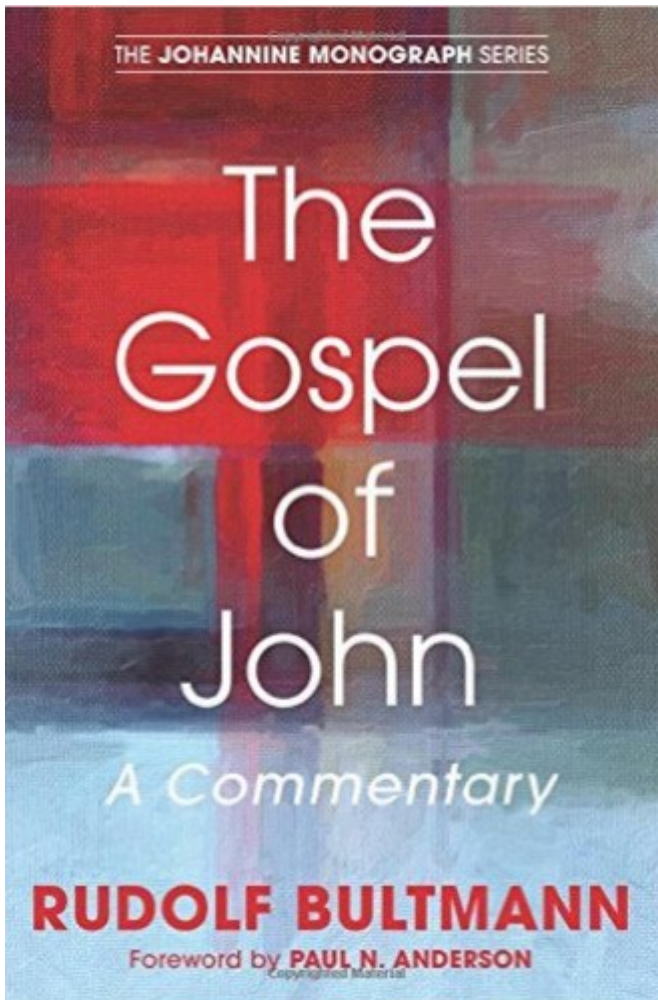


Layers of John

by [Robert W. Jenson](#) in the [May 11, 2016](#) issue

In Review



The Gospel of John

Rudolf Bultmann

Wipf & Stock

The Century invited people to comment on their favorite book of the Bible and a book that has helped them appreciate or understand the biblical text. All of the responses are linked [here](#).

One might expect me to choose Ezekiel or Song of Songs, since I have written commentaries on both. But looking back I find that the book that most fascinates me is the Gospel of John. I will instance two of the book's wonders.

First, the text before us is plainly the product of one or more theologically driven revisions. The result is a layered structure, where the theological revising is often blatant. For example, all flesh is at one place called useless while at another we are told that we are saved by the sacramental eating of Jesus' flesh. And then there's the beauty of it all. In this book about the Revealer, the play between the theologoumena of layers in a pile regularly displays the inner dialectic of the very notion of revelation.

Second, and more to the concerns of my own work, this Gospel utterly discombobulates our inherited construals of time. The preface seems to suppose that there was first the Logos, and that later he took on flesh. But in the story itself we hear the specifically incarnate Son say, "Before Abraham was, I am." Deal with that, who dare! I have been about taking my best shots.

Rudolf Bultmann's great commentary *The Gospel of John* is often preposterous and always illuminating.