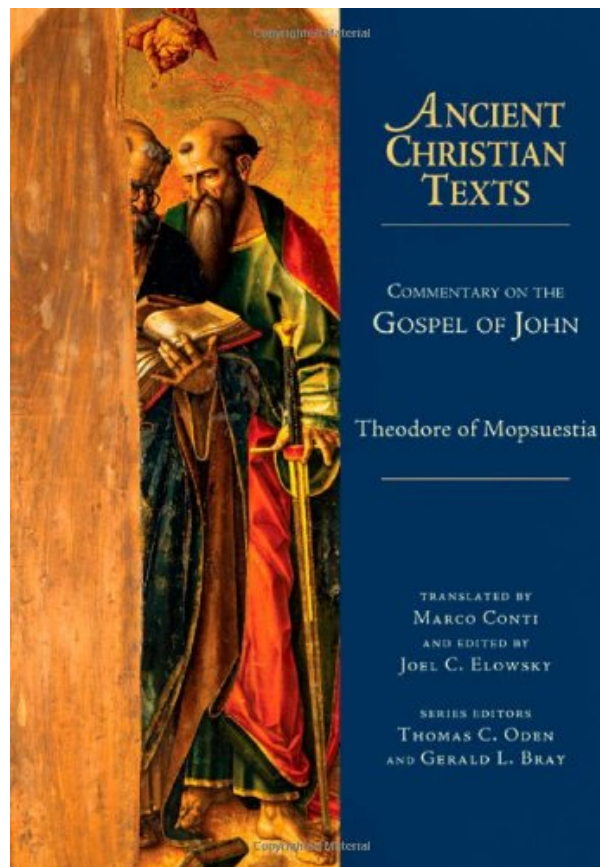
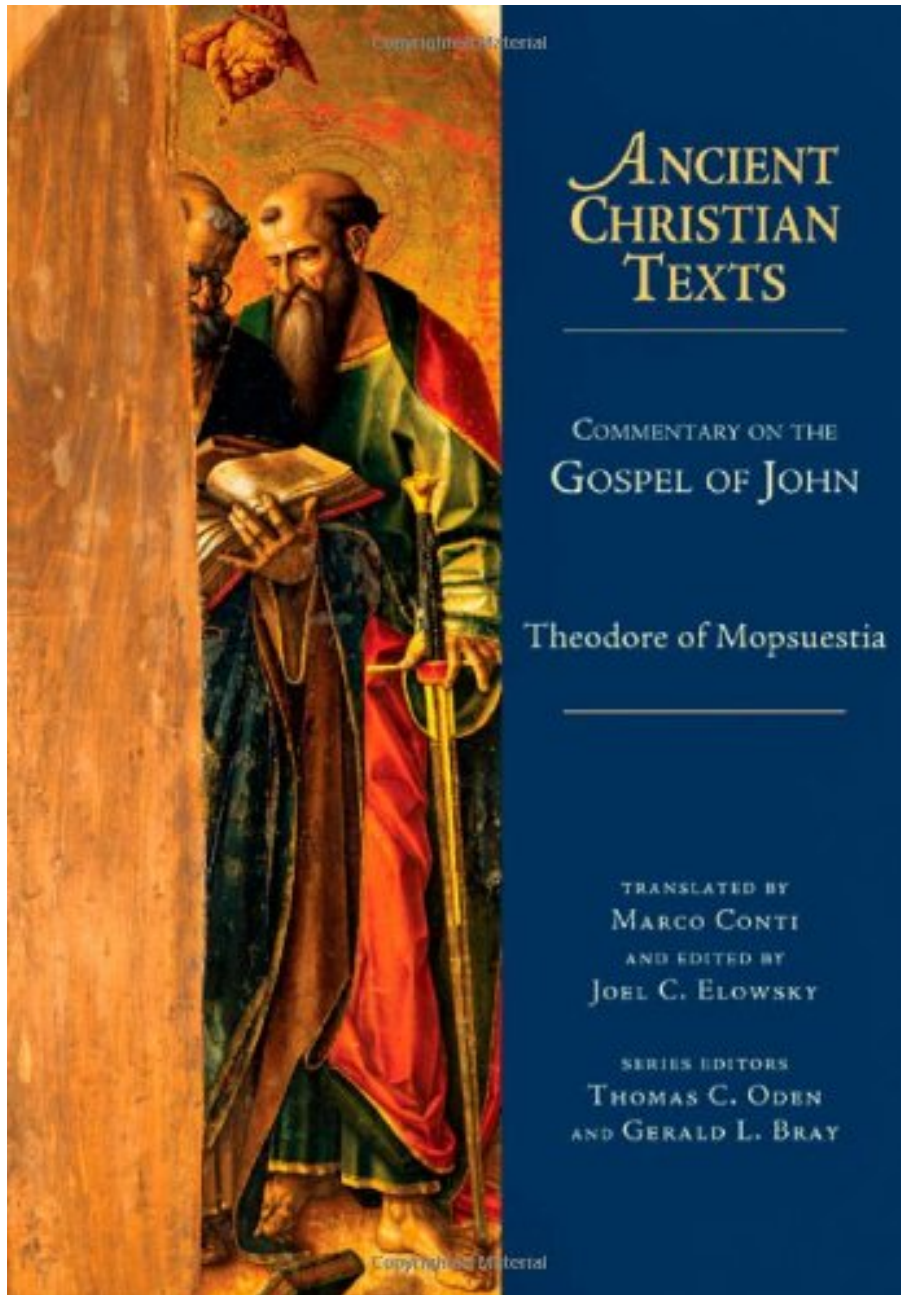


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Theodore of Mopsuestia, born in Antioch (c. 350) and a disciple of Diodore of Tarsus, serves as one of the most important exemplars of Antiochene exegesis of his generation. Committed to literal, linguistic, grammatical and historical interpretation, he eschewed allegorical explanations that could not be supported from the text, though he was not averse to typological interpretations of Old Testament texts that were supported by the New. Regrettably, Theodore was dragged posthumously into the Nestorian controversy, and his works were condemned by the Three Chapters and the Council of Constantinople in 553. As a result many of his theological and exegetical works were lost or destroyed. The original Greek version of his Commentary on the Gospel of John remains only in fragments. This new English translation is based on an early complete Syriac translation dated A.D. 460-465, within forty years of Theodore's death in 428. While charges of heterodoxy against Theodore may not be entirely justified, there remains an apparent dualism in his Christology that should be critically viewed in light of the later Chalcedonian formula. With this caution, there still remains much that is valuable for contemporary readers, whether preachers, students or lay people interested in the early church's understanding of the Gospel of John. Here for the first time is a complete English translation of this valuable work, ably translated by Marco Conti and edited by Joel C. Elowsky. Ancient Christian Texts is a series of new translations, most of which are here presented in English for the first time. The series provides contemporary readers with the resources they need to study for themselves the key writings of the early church. The texts represented in the series are full-length commentaries or sermon series based on biblical books or extended scriptural passages.

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Devout commentator gives the clear sense

By Michael Dalton

Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary on John brings to mind an incident in the history of ancient Israel. The people gathered together, and Ezra the scribe read from the Book of the Law of Moses. Ezra was joined by others that "helped the people to understand the Law ... They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:7-8 ESV).

Theodore does much the same throughout this commentary. He recites the verses and then gives the sense of the passage omitting extraneous words. He uses paraphrase to make it understandable. His commentary of John 16, where Jesus predicts persecution for the disciples, is characteristic: "(16:4) But I have said these

things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. 'If I had not predicted these things,' he says, 'you might have lost your courage because these afflictions would have befallen you unexpectedly and you would have been unprepared. But if instead I predict what will happen to you, then, after it has happened, you will have to admire the power of the one who made the prediction, which is why you should have no doubt about the blessings I promised you.' "

His way of using expansive thought to get at the underlying meaning seems unique. Although some of it is conjecture, most of it is plausible. He avoids being overly analytical and instead offers insight from an early era.

This was written in the late fourth or early fifth century. Theodore died in 428. His proximity to the church fathers gives him a different perspective than modern commentators. He highlights some of the erroneous interpretations of John's gospel present in his own time. He draws attention to particulars (including refutation of heretics) in John's writing that may be overlooked.

He makes it clear that John was writing to include those events omitted by the other gospel writers. In addition, John was concerned about the precise order of events, because, as Theodore puts it, "the others had taken no care in this regard."

A major aspect that informs his reflections is his reverence. What one sees is a reflection of character. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8 ESV). "With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous" (Psalm 18:25-26 ESV). It's obvious from his writing and language that Theodore's eye was single, making his body of work full of light.

That's not to say that he is always right. He was not without controversy. His Christology is somewhat flawed in that he sees "an excessive separation between Christ's human and divine natures, which is due on the one hand, to the fact that an accurate definition of the unity of Christ's nature was established only after Theodore's death; on the other, to the fact that in his polemic against the Apollinarians he exaggerated the separation of the two natures of Christ." This is something that the reader must keep in mind, and occasionally it makes for awkward reading, but this is no reason to skip this commentary. The editor includes helpful notes as a reminder and for clarification.

Aside from getting a clear sense of what John is all about, finding a passage like the following, where Theodore comments on Jesus' example of service at the Passover meal, made this worth the read for me. Here we see how his reverence toward God, others and all of life informs his insight. "Humility is the principle of all virtues. It removes any conflict, division or dissension among people, planting peace and charity among them instead. And through charity humility grows and increases. Our Lord frequently desired to teach this to his disciples through his words and works."

Modern commentaries may go deeper and provide more suggestions for application, but this devout commentator succeeds in providing the basic sense of what is being said.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Theodore of Mopsuestia on John

By David P. Efroymson

The translation is a readable one, and makes available for the first time in English an early fifth-century commentary on John. It is high time such a translation has been made available.

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