

The Office of an Interpreter

The office of the interpreter is not to add another interpretation, but to recover the original one; the meaning, that is, of the words as they struck on the ears or flashed before the eyes of those who first heard and read them. He has to transfer himself to another age; to imagine that he is a disciple of Christ... to disengage himself from all that follows.

The history of Christendom is nothing to him; but only the scene at Galilee or Jerusalem, the handful of believers who gathered themselves together at Ephesus, or Corinth, or Rome. His eye is fixed on the form of one like the Son of Man, or of the Prophet who was girded with a garment of camel's hair, or of the Apostle who had a thorn in the flesh.

The greatness of the Roman Empire is nothing to him; it is an inner not an outer world that he is striving to restore. All the after-thoughts of theology are nothing to him; they are not the true lights which light him in difficult places. His concern is with a book in which, as in other ancient writings, are some things of which we are ignorant... The simple words of that book he tries to preserve absolutely pure from the refinements or distinctions of later times.

(An Examination of Canon Liddon's Bampton Lectures on The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by A Clergyman of the Church of England, London: Trübner & Co., 1871, e-book, 6, Paragraph Structure Modified)