

ILLUSTRATIONS
OF THE
END OF THE CHURCH.

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ILLUSTRATIONS
OF THE
END OF THE CHURCH,

AS PREDICTED IN MATTHEW, CHAP. XXIV.;

DERIVED FROM
AN EXAMINATION, ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF SWEDENBORG, OF
THE COMMONLY RECEIVED DOCTRINES

OF THE
TRINITY, INCARNATION, ATONEMENT,
AND
MEDIATION;

TO WHICH ARE ADDED, REMARKS UPON

THE TIME OF THE END.

"SEEST THOU THESE GREAT BUILDINGS? THERE SHALL NOT BE LEFT ONE STONE UPON
ANOTHER, THAT SHALL NOT BE THROWN DOWN.. TELL US WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE."

Mark xiii. 2, 4.

BY THE
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P R E F A C E.

THE following work is only a sketch. The object of it is to illustrate, upon the principles of Swedenborg, the state of the church as predicted in Scripture.

Christendom may be said to be divided into three parts; the Greek, the Roman, and the Protestant churches. With regard to the former, we have said nothing specifically in the present work; because, upon the subjects we have considered, it is so nearly identified with the Roman and Protestant churches, as to render any particular mention of it unnecessary; the observations we have applied to the two latter, being in general equally applicable to the former. Our illustrations, therefore, of the end of the church, are taken from Roman Catholic and Protestant writers.

There are three ways in which a church may be conceived to come to its end: the first, by the closing of the dispensation; the second, by its apostacy; the third, by both.

With regard to the first it may be observed, that as, in general, the several dispensations of Providence are all relative one to the other; so, in particular, the Jewish was relative or preparatory to the Christian. Had the Jewish nation continued faithful to their religion, yet the dispensation, being only preparatory, would have ceased at the

institution of Christianity. In like manner, at Christ's second coming, the previous dispensation ceases, being superseded by another; whatever we may conceive that other to be. For if, with some commentators, we interpret the description of the New Jerusalem at the close of the Apocalypse, as referring to a new dispensation upon earth, the application of our remark is self-evident: on the other hand, if we refer the description to a state of things taking place only in a future existence, still the remark will be found to apply. The dispensation ceasing, all those churches cease which had been established under it; or, in general, the catholic church, even though we presumed it had continued faithful to the end. Not that the truths it taught should cease, for this would be impossible; but that they should be regarded simply as elementary, in relation to the higher order of truth, or greater degree of light, which had succeeded. In either case, to prove the church to have been faithful, would not be to prove that the dispensation under which it had continued, and consequently the church itself, had not come to its end. The most complete demonstrations might be furnished in proof that the church was apostolical; that the fathers had set forth the real fundamental doctrines of the gospel; that the formularies of the church were in strict accordance with the word of God; that many were the preachers who had enlightened the dark places of the earth, and many the members of the church who had died in the faith; yet, in regard to the fact that the church had *not* come to its end, all this would prove nothing. The very circumstance of the faithfulness of the church might be cited to shew, that the Lord had hastened his kingdom; that the Spirit and the bride had said, Come; that he that was athirst had said, Come; that the language

of the whole church, in this case, had been, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." The faithfulness of the church, therefore, so far from proving that her time had not yet come, might only tend to shew the fulfilment of the prophecy, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." At such a period, any unwillingness, any hesitation on the part of the church to welcome his coming, might rather tend to awaken the surmise whether her loins really were girded, her lights really burning, and she herself waiting for the coming of the Lord.

This consideration brings us to the second way in which a church may be conceived to come to its end, namely, by its apostacy.

In this case, although primitively a *true* church, she had subsequently fallen away from the truth. Under these circumstances, to shew that the early writers of the church were in possession of the truth, and, in *opposition* to prevailing doctrines, to revert to those writers, would only be a confession of a prevailing defection: on the other hand, to maintain that the prevailing doctrines of the church, as *opposed* to those of its earlier ages, were right, would only be to admit the fact of a previous defection. It should be remembered, however, that there are three kinds of defection or apostacy: first, apostacy from love; secondly, apostacy from truth; thirdly, apostacy from both.

With regard to the first, or apostacy from love or charity, we are told, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. Love is the fulfilling of the law*: and St. Paul says, *Now abideth faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love*. The beginning, therefore, of the time in which the members of the Christian

church cease to live in love, is the real beginning of its defection. In this case, the illustrations of the end of the church are derived from the history of its internal wars and dissensions: but as the reception of Christian truth depends upon the state of the will, as a pure heart receives the truth in its purity, and an impure one corrupts and perverts it; so a defection from love naturally leads, in the course of time, to a defection from truth, or a corruption of the faith; that is to say, to the consummation of both the second and third kinds of defection or apostacy. Here, however, there are two things to be remembered. First, that a person may love God and his neighbor, and yet believe some things that are false. Under such circumstances, untruth does not hurt him. False doctrine is, indeed, a deadly thing; but all deadly things do not hurt: for our Savior says of his true disciples, *If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.* Secondly, a person may have no love of God, and yet maintain true doctrine. In this case he is, nevertheless, not a true disciple of Christ. The first has within him the essence of a true church, but not the perfect doctrinal form; the second has the doctrinal form, but not the real essence. A church composed of individuals such as the latter, would nevertheless not be a church; there might be an outward appearance of life and health, but inwardly there would be nothing but death and corruption.

The last way in which a church may be conceived to come to its end, is, by the closing of the dispensation, and by its apostacy combined. For a church might be apostate, and yet be allowed by Providence to continue, until the fulness of time should come when a new church might be established. For Providence does not remove evil at once, but

awaits times and seasons; letting the tares grow up with the wheat, lest, in removing the tares, the wheat should be removed also.

Let us apply these remarks to the present state of Christendom.

All writers agree, that at some period or other, and in some way or other, the present dispensation will cease. All writers agree that, previously to this period, the Scriptures predict an apostacy. We have the testimony of the Church of Rome, that the Protestant Church is apostate; we have the testimony of the Protestant Church, that the Church of Rome is apostate; we have the testimony of both churches, that the doctrines of the two are fundamentally the same: what then is the natural conclusion? Let us take the testimony of writers of eminence in the Protestant Church: and first, the testimony of Bishop Hurd. Tracing the history of Antichrist, he observes:

“We now enter on the sixteenth century, distinguished in the annals of mankind by that great event, the reformation of long oppressed and much adulterated religion. The Christian world had slumbered in its chains, for full ten ages; but liberty came at last, *libertas quæ sera tamen respexit inertem.* This important work was begun and prosecuted on the common principle, that the bishop of Rome was Antichrist; and the great separation from the Church of Rome was everywhere justified on the idea, that Rome was the Babylon of the Revelation, and that Christians were bound, by an express command in those prophecies, to come out of her communion.” (It is well known that, in the Apocalypse, this Babylon is called the great whore that hath filled the earth with her fornications; that she is the mother