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IS THE UNANIMOUS CONSENT OF THE FATHERS THE RULE OF FAITH TO THE CHURCH?

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To this question, the Tractarian party has replied in the affirmative, and contended long and earnestly in support of their favourite tenet. In this they have but followed the example of the Church of Rome; who, long before Tractarians were heard of, had decreed, through the Council of Trent, the heaviest penalties against all who should dare to interpret Scripture, "contra unanimem consensusum Patrum." Permit me to present a few thoughts on this "rule of faith."

And, *first*, it is an arbitrary one. Its abettors can produce no authority for it, from Scripture or reason. The Word of God never directs us to go to the "early Fathers," nor to any thing beyond itself, for the rule of faith. Reason plainly teaches, that if God has given us an infallible rule, in his holy word, we should not associate with it the opinions, or speculations, of uninspired and fallible men. This dogma, therefore, rests on the mere affirmation of those who espouse it; it is an arbitrary, unsupported assumption.

Why are the writings of the *early Fathers* of the Church alone received, and the writings of all other Christian

divines excluded? We not only require some strong reason to convince us that we ought to go out of the Scriptures at all, and seek the rule of faith in the writings of Christian authors; but an equally strong reason to prove that we must have recourse only to the writings of persons who lived within a certain period. We require not only sufficient reason to show, that we are to go beyond the limits of the written word; but sufficient reason to show that we should not go farther than a certain point; that we should absolutely stop at the writings of the Fathers of the third or the fourth century. Some tell us that, by "the Fathers," they understand the Christian writers of the *two* first centuries; others include the *three* first centuries; others go so far as the *fourth*; others still farther, while others at various intermediate dates. But no one pretends to assign any reason, other than his own opinion, for halting at the precise period which he is pleased to prefer. If we ask one, why he embraces the fathers of the two first centuries only, in his rule of faith, and refuses to comprehend those of the *third*; or if we ask another, why he does not stop at the