Editor's Foreword

It is a great pleasure to be the final link in bringing these authoritative documents to the English-speaking public.

The book contains the original text with a facing English translation of all the decrees of all the twenty-one councils (Nicaea I in 325 to Vatican II in 1962–1965) which are regarded by the Roman Catholic Church — and by most other churches in the case of the first seven councils — as ecumenical (or general) councils¹. In addition, there is a brief introduction and bibliography for each council and explanatory footnotes.

Its significance is self-evident. The ecumenical councils form the most important part of Christian "tradition". Therefore for Christians, at least for Roman Catholics, the book may be regarded as the most authoritative work in the world after the Bible. As well as their religious and theological significance, the conciliar decrees are documents of major historical importance.

Nothing comparable exists for English readers. This is the first translation into English of all ecumenical councils together, and the first to print such a complete English translation alongside the text.

Text
The text is a photographic reproduction of that contained in the latest edition of Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, ed. G. Alberigo and others, third edition, Bologna, Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1973 (= COD). This fine critical edition represents much of the best text available and provides for the first time a reliable text for all the ecumenical councils. We are most grateful to Professor Alberigo and his co-editors for making their edition available to us. The only changes that we have made are to correct some of the (remarkably few) typographical errors, those which can be made readily in photographic reproduction.

Translation
There has been an urgent need for an English translation of all the ecumenical councils. For many councils, previously, English translations were available only in inaccessible or inadequate versions, or not at all. The publication of COD has provided a text from which an adequate translation of all councils is possible.

¹ For the distinction between "decrees" and "acts" of councils, and for the definition of "ecumenical", see pp. xi and xv–xviii.
The translation is the work of 29 Jesuits from, or working in, the British Isles. Namely:

**Introduction**
- William Pearsall

**Nicaea I**
- Edward Yarnold

**Constantinople I**
- Robert Butterworth

**Ephesus**
- Anthony Meredith

**Chalcedon**
- Robert Butterworth

**Constantinople II**
- Peter Gallagher

**Constantinople III**
- John Moffatt

**Nicaea II**
- Joseph Munitiz

**Constantinople IV**
- Anthony Parish

**Lateran I**
- Andrew Cameron-Mowat

**Lateran II**
- Peter Burns

**Lateran III**
- Frederick Turner

**Lateran IV**
- Norman Tanner

**Lyons I**
- Frederick Turner

**Lyons II**
- Thomas Murphy

**Vienne**
- Thomas Murphy

**Constance**
- Norman Tanner

**Basel — Ferrara — Florence — Rome**
- Joseph Gill

**Lateran V**
- Peter McIlhenny

**Trent**
- Peter McIlhenny

--- sessions 1–16
- John Coventry

--- sessions 17–25
- Ian Brayley

**Vatican I**
- Philip Endean

**Vatican II**
- John Griffin

--- Liturgy
- Clarence Gallagher

--- Mass media
- Leo Arnold

--- The church
- Edward Yarnold

--- Eastern catholic churches
- John Tracy

--- Ecumenism
- Peter Hackett

--- Religious life
- John Duggan

--- Bishops
- Anthony Forrester

--- Christian education
- Leo Arnold

--- Non-christian religions
- Robert Murray

--- Revelation
- Ralph Woodhall

--- Laiety
- John Coventry

--- Religious freedom
- Michael G. O’Brien

--- Missionary activity
- John Coventry

--- Priests
- John Mahoney

--- The church in the world

I am responsible for the final editing of the whole work. In a book of this size there are bound to be some errors: for these we apologise and will be most
grateful if any significant ones are brought to our attention. The aim has been to provide an accurate and readable translation, not a literary masterpiece.

The format and lay-out of the text in COD has been preserved as far as possible, except that very long paragraphs have been divided into shorter ones when possible. The capitalisation of the original has been preserved, except when this jars noticeably with modern English usage. Parentheses indicate supplied material (i.e. []). It should be noted that the words "council" and "synod" are synonymous: our policy has been to translate συνόδος/synodus as "synod", and concilium as "council".

We have gone as far as we thought justifiable in the use of "inclusive" language. This was my decision but I had the support, sometimes enthusiastic, of most translators. To put it into effect has not always been easy and we apologise for any infelicities of style. Nevertheless most of us feel that the advantages greatly outweigh any disadvantages, in many respects. We have, however, been unable to find a convenient way round using masculine pronouns and adjectives for God.

**Introductions and footnotes**

Each council begins with a brief introduction and a bibliography. The introductions are translations of those in COD. The bibliographies are based on those in the same work, but we have tried to update them with the most important recent works, and we have noted English translations of the books mentioned.

The explanatory footnotes are also taken from COD, but we have tried to update the bibliographical references and have noted English translations of books, except for papal encyclicals and works of the fathers. English translations of all papal encyclicals since 1740 are conveniently found in *The Papal Encyclicals 1740–1981*, ed. C. Carlen, 5 vols. no place 1981. The most convenient guides to English translations of the fathers are: J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 3 vols. Utrecht 1950–1960; B. Altaner, *Patrology*, trans. H. C. Graef, Freiburg and Edinburgh 1960. Of the textual footnotes, only the more important ones have been included in the English translation.

**Pagination**

The pagination has been arranged so as to preserve the same page-numbers for the original text as are to be found in COD\(^1\). The obvious reason is to facilitate reference to this original version. The facing page of English translation has the same page-number as the original text, but is distinguished by an asterisk (e.g., 1/\(^*\)1). In other respects the pagination runs consecutively throughout the book (though occasionally a page-number is omitted on account of the slightly different location of blank pages).

**Acknowledgements**

Our first and greatest debt is to Professor Alberigo and his co-editors for

---

\(^1\) I.e. the third and latest edition (1973). Note that the pagination of the first (1962) and second (1962) editions is different from that of the third.
providing the original text from which our translation has been made. Without their labours our work would have been impossible. In this respect we also acknowledge with pleasure our debt to the numerous earlier writers and editors working on conciliar decrees who, in their turn, made COD possible.


Although we have received much help from the above translations (we apologise for any accidental breaches of copyright), the present translations are new and our responsibility. There is one exception: the translation of Vatican II’s decree on ecumenism is an adaptation by Edward Yarnold taken from *The Vatican Council and Christian Unity*, by Bernard Leeming S.J., published and copyright 1966 by Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., and is used by permission of the publishers. We acknowledge use of the Revised Standard Version in Biblical quotations, though we have not quoted from this version uniformly since the councils, especially in their use of the Latin Vulgate, were quoting from texts which at times varied considerably from those on which the RSV is based; the New Jerusalem Bible has been particularly helpful for “inclusive” language.

Our debts to individuals for help on particular points are far too numerous to mention, but our thanks to them are no less sincere for that. We thank Mr Martin Redfern of Sheed & Ward Ltd. for his patience and support at all stages; Fr John Breslin S.J. of Georgetown University Press, the co-publisher; Mr Bill Ireson of Bridgehead Publishing Services and Fakenham Photosetting Ltd. for their efficiency and considerateness in a typesetting operation of considerable complexity; Fr Brian Ferme for help on points of canon law. Finally, as editor, I thank all the translators for the speed and efficiency with which they produced their translations and for responding to my various other requests.

NORMAN TANNER

*Campion Hall, Oxford*