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The Documents of Vatican II Walter M. Abbott, S. J.
General Editor, and Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph
Gallagher, Translation Editor

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WALTER M. ABBOTT, S. J. General Editor, and VERY REV. MSGR. JOSEPH GALLAGHER, Translation Editor. *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York: America Press-Association Press, 1966. 792 pp.

Many of the outstanding works of both Catholic and Protestant conciliar scholarship, especially those produced on the continent in languages other than English, are almost unknown here in the United States. This publication has compensated in part for that deficiency. The whole work is a witness of the reasonable reliability of the conciliar operation as it was carried out under modern conditions in Vatican II.

Although editor Abbott deserves proper recognition, the real credit should go to the Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher for an outstanding translation job. The technical terms of any ecclesiastical Latin document present a formidable challenge to the best language scholars, and Father Gallagher has not been found wanting.

It would not be easy for the general editor to get into academic trouble with the redaction of the documents themselves. They simply are all there, relieving the reader of any concern about control of information through selectivity. It is with respect to the choosing and editing of those who wrote the introductory portions preceding each document and the respective follow-up response in each instance that there is justification for criticism.

Not every author of the given response offers genuine and objective critical evaluation of the document under consideration. This might be anticipated in light of the fact that eight respondents were hand-picked from among the non-Catholic official observers at the Council and must have sensed, at least indirectly, a degree of responsibility for the outcome, some having functioned in an advisory capacity to the several draft committees in spite of their non-Catholic identification with the Council.

Several of the writers of introductory materials from an inner-camera vantage point have witnessed the evolution of certain documents from the first draft through to the accepted and promulgated finished product. Knowing the painful process of polishing which took place, they feel proud and satisfied with what emerged in comparison with what was first

offered. This is vividly described in the words of Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan of Atlanta:

Every document of the Council picked its way through the rocky fields of preparation and debate (with a crossfire of criticism, amendments, rejection or qualified approval) to the final conciliar approval and promulgation.

In some instances the respondent, showing forth his general enthusiasm for the spirit of *Aggiornamento* so apparent in much of the work of the Council, has read greater ecumenicity into the text of a given document than a more careful scrutiny will justify. Moreover, the occasional appearance of a statement or portion of a document which reflects a reversion back to Catholicism's traditional position brings forth a show of disappointment from the Protestant respondent as though such were not to be expected, and the resulting mild hand-slapping has an amusing, naughty, naughty tone.

In spite of any weaknesses, the whole work is generally commendable and as in the case of the Council itself, might well cause one to wonder if the dialogue which it reflects is really true. On the other hand, there remains always the tragic possibility that much of this may suffer the fate of many former Council contributions and in the words of Dr. Albert C. Outler, "promptly be interred in the vast mausoleum of ecumenical literature," and never be actually implemented in the ongoing life of the church.

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