

## ***Despicere mundum et terrena:* A Spiritual and Liturgical Motif in the *Missale Romanum***

DANIEL G. VAN SLYKE

*Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St Louis, Missouri*

This article traces the Latin tradition of the use of the verb *despicere* in phrases such as *despicere mundum et terrena* from the fathers of the Church (especially Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory the Great) through the Roman missals published up to 1962. *Despicere mundum* designates a basic Christian disposition or attitude of mind and heart whereby this world with all its pleasures and glories is accounted as of nothing in comparison with God and the things of heaven. Such a disposition makes martyrdom possible, but also must characterise the attitude of every Christian believer. Therefore *despicere* appeared in more and more Mass orations between the sixteenth and the mid twentieth century. This study's final sections discuss the purging of the verb *despicere* from the Roman missals promulgated after the Second Vatican Council. The author suggests that the stated reasons for almost entirely eliminating the verb are not convincing, and that the term should be revisited in the interest of the spiritual formation of the faithful through participation in the Mass.

KEYWORDS *despicere*, fathers of the Church, formation, liturgy, Mass, missal, *mundum*, Roman, spirituality

This study focuses on the Latin tradition of the use of the verb *despicere* to designate a Christian attitude of mind and heart toward this passing world with all its pleasures and glories. The investigation begins with select teachings from the Latin fathers of the Church which lay the groundwork for the spiritual and theological import of the verb. The second section comments on how the liturgy utilises *despicere mundum et terrena* to characterise a holy Christian disposition. Proper orations from the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 which employ the verb *despicere* provide the topic of the third section. The final sections consider the fate of such phrases in the revised Roman missals that followed the Second Vatican Council.

My sincerest thanks go to those colleagues who have provided invaluable comments on the drafts of this article: Stephen Beall, Dylan Schrader, Kristian Teater, Brian Van Hove SJ, and Samuel F. Weber OSB.

Although more fully bringing out its Christian connotations is one purpose of this entire study, a preliminary definition of the verb *despicere* must be provided at the outset. The word means first and foremost ‘to look down on’. It also carries the weight of such English words as spurn, condemn, despise, and disdain.<sup>1</sup> Note, moreover, that the English cognate ‘despise’ also means first and foremost ‘to look down upon’.<sup>2</sup> To look down upon something does not necessarily entail hating it. In its liturgical context, as will be demonstrated, the manner of regarding something indicated by *despicere* is typically juxtaposed to a contrasting manner of regarding something else, evoked with words such as *amare* (to love), *adhaerere* (to cling to), *deligere* (to choose), or *sectari* (to pursue). In such contexts, the word indicates seeing things in their proper order or in their proper hierarchical relationship, and fixing one’s attention upon what is better rather than on what is inferior. In consideration of heavenly realities, one should look down upon earthly realities or regard them as naught. This attitude of mind and heart undergirds the Christian moral life.

Translating *despicere* into modern languages admittedly is tricky. In current English usage, the word ‘despise’ may not always convey well the force of traditional Latin phrases containing *despicere* from the perspectives of meaning or reader reaction.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity the Latin word will be consistently rendered by its English cognate throughout this study. Moreover, ‘despise’ bears its wider, Christian hierarchical and comparative sense in what follows.

### *Despicere mundum et terrena in the patristic period*

The use of the verb *despicere* to illustrate the proper Christian attitude toward the world can be traced back to the origins of Latin Christian literature. Tertullian, the first significant Christian author to write in Latin, also is the first to use the verb in order to exemplify the Christian’s proper attitude toward earthly realities. Tertullian exhorts his wife: ‘Think often on things heavenly, and you will despise things earthly.’<sup>4</sup> To despise worldly goods is not an end in itself; rather, it is the corollary of prayerfully contemplating heavenly realities. Throughout the early Christian period, this basic principle of Christian spirituality recurs. This section considers how three ancient doctors of the Church — Sts Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory the Great — articulate the ideal Christian attitude toward worldly goods with the verb *despicere*.

<sup>1</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum siue Originum* X.76 (*Patrologia Latina* [=PL] 82: 375 [468]): ‘Despiciens, eo quod deorsum aspiat uel contemptui habeat’; *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), p. 527; *Lexicon totius Latinitatis* (Patavii: Typis Seminarii, 1940), vol. 2, p. 89; *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* (Paris: Teubner, 1909–1934), vol. 5, pars prior, pp. 743–47.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), vol. 4, p. 530: also ‘to view with contempt; to think scornfully or slightly of’.

<sup>3</sup> Apropos of the language of liturgy and further discussions regarding translations, consider Christine Mohrmann’s timeless admonition in *Liturgical Latin: Its Origins and Character* (London: Burns & Oates, 1957), p. 1: ‘If one wishes to study the phenomenon of sacred and hieratic languages, one must first rid oneself of the still widespread conception that the only function of human language is that of communication; in other words, that language only serves to make known, as clearly and efficiently as possible, that which the speaker wishes to convey to his hearer.’

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *Ad uxorem* I.4 (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* [=CCSL] 1: 378): ‘Praesume, oro te, nihil tibi opus esse, si domino appareas, immo omnia habere, si habeas dominum, suus omnia. Caelestia recogita, et terrena despicias.’

St Ambrose of Milan delivers an entire homily on ‘flight’ from the world (*fuga mundi*) or age (*fuga saeculi*) — that is, on ‘fleeing this world and its contagion’.<sup>5</sup> In it, he illustrates the necessity of fleeing from the world with a series of scriptural exempla including, for example, Elijah’s flight from Jezebel. According to Ambrose’s spiritual interpretation, Elijah fled not from a woman but from this world: ‘He endured a weariness of this life, not a desire (*non cupiditatem*) for it, but he was fleeing worldly enticement and the contagion of filthy conduct and the impious acts of an unholy and sinful generation.’<sup>6</sup> Like Tertullian, Ambrose does not consider despising or fleeing the world as an end in itself. One flees the world in order to pursue and seek God; one flees corruptible goods in order to seek after incorruptible, eternal good: ‘One who has sought God and has found Him exists among those good things that endure always. For where a man’s heart is, there also is his treasure’ (Mt 6:21).<sup>7</sup> The treasures of God endure forever. In comparison with heavenly treasures, the desire or concupiscence for the vanities of worldly successes and pleasures is to be despised. Ambrose sees this lesson especially in the book of Ecclesiastes, in which Solomon despises the vanities of this world.<sup>8</sup>

Ambrose illustrates a common patristic usage whereby *despicere* means to recognise that something is inferior to heavenly realities and, by comparison, to be counted as nothing. He admonishes the Christian with military imagery to avoid the desire for worldly pleasure: ‘but you contend as a good soldier of Christ Jesus and despising the inferior, forgetful of the earthly, strive zealously for the celestial and eternal’.<sup>9</sup> Above all, Ambrose points to an interior attitude of proper order or orientation toward God, which begets a desire for God and a consequent waning of desire for joys, pleasures, and triumphs in the world. Ambrose highlights this attitude in relation to the Sacred Scripture when he comments on the words of the Song of Songs, ‘Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine’ (Songs 1:2):

‘let him kiss,’ she says, ‘me’. The word of God kisses us, when the spirit of knowledge illuminates our thought — as if, both despising all its delights and pleasures and desiring to cleave to the celestial commands, it says: ‘for the precepts of your testaments are better than all longing of the flesh and pleasures of the age’.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ambrose, *De fuga saeculi* 4.17 (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [= CSEL] 32.2: 178): ‘fugientes hoc saeculum et eius contagionem’.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 6.34 (CSEL 32.2: 191): ‘taedium uitae istius sustinens, non cupiditatem, sed fugiebat saecularem inlecebram et conuersationis maculosae contagionem et impiae ac praeuaricatricis nationis sacrilegia’; trans. Michael P. McHugh, *Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation 65 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1972), pp. 307–8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 6.36 (CSEL 32.2: 191–92): ‘in illis bonis est qui deum quaesierit et inuenerit, ubi enim cor hominis ibi est thesaurus eius est’; trans. McHugh, p. 308.

<sup>8</sup> Ambrose, *De Isaac uel anima* 4.23 (CSEL 32.1: 657): ‘Ecclesiastes naturalis, in quo quasi uanitates istius despicit mundi’.

<sup>9</sup> Ambrose, *De bono mortis* 6.24 (CSEL 32.1: 725): ‘sed tu oblectare quasi bonus miles Christi Iesu et inferiora despiciens, terrena obliuiscens ad caelestia et aeterna contende. attolle animam tuam, ne eam inlicitat esca laqueorum. uoluptates saeculi escae quaedam sunt et quod peius escae malorum, escae temptationum. dum uoluptatem quaeris, laqueos incurris’, my translation.

<sup>10</sup> Ambrose, *Expositio psalmi cxviii* 1.5 (CSEL 62: 8): “osculatur”, inquit, “me” — osculatur nos dei uerbum, quando sensum nostrum spiritus cognitionis inluminat — et tamquam despiciens omnes iucunditates et delectationes suas, caelestibus cupiens inhaerere mandatis ait: “quoniam optima praecepta testamentorum tuorum super omnem adpetentiam carnis et saeculi uoluptatem”, my translation.

Thus Ambrose expresses that the Christian life consists in longing not for the pleasures and triumphs of the senses, but rather for the law of God, Sacred Scripture. The desire for the word of God and divine precepts — celestial, eternal realities — leads to despising the joys of the earth.

The antithesis or corollary of despising worldly desires is loving and desiring earthly pleasures. In his treatise *On Christian Combat*, St Augustine, who learned the interpretation of Scripture from Ambrose, comments on the evil of loving the world and its transient goods as follows:

It is wicked to love this world and the things which come into being and pass away. It is wicked to esteem them highly, to covet and labor to acquire them, to rejoice when they are possessed in abundance, to be fearful lest they be lost, to be made sad when, in fact, they are lost. This manner of life cannot behold that pure, genuine, and unchangeable truth; it cannot abide therein, remaining forever unchanged.<sup>11</sup>

This does not entail that the world is evil. Quite the contrary, Augustine repeatedly insists against the Manicheans that God created the world good. Nonetheless, an inordinate love of the world betrays subordination to the Devil, who is the prince of the world. Augustine discusses this in relation to the relevant verse from the Gospel according to John:

He is referring to the Devil where He says: ‘The prince of this world has been cast out’ [Jn 12:31]. Not that he has been cast out of the world, as certain heretics suppose, but that he has been cast out of the souls of men who hold fast to the word of God and are not lovers of the world, of which he is the prince. The Devil rules over lovers of temporal goods belonging to this visible world, not because he is lord of this world, but because he is ruler of those covetous desires by which we long for all that passes away.<sup>12</sup>

Augustine poses a subtle but important distinction: the Devil rules not the world itself but those who sinfully desire the things of the world, and thereby become the enemies of God. The created world is not the problem; the problem is in the desires of those who love the world in a disordered fashion. Their internal attachment or preference is evil — that is, their preference or option for a world that is passing away over God who abides eternally. Therefore Augustine exhorts his congregation to purity of heart, that is, freedom from disordered desire, which enables one to conquer the world along with the Devil: ‘if you despise the world, you will have a pure heart, and

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *De agone christiano* XIII.14 (CSEL 41: 118): ‘nequitia est autem mundum istum diligere et ea, quae nascuntur et transeunt, pro magno habere et ea concupiscere et pro his laborare, ut adquirantur; et laetari, cum abundarint, et timere, ne pereant, et contristari, cum pereunt. talis uita non potest puram illam et sinceram et incommutabilem uidere ueritatem et inhaerere illi et in aeternum iam non moueri’; trans. Robert P. Russell, *The Christian Combat*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation 5 (New York: CIMA, 1947), pp. 331–32.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. I.1 (CSEL 41: 102): ‘ipsum significat dicens: *princeps huius mundi missus est foras*, non quia extra mundum missus est, quomodo quidam haeretici putant, sed foras ab animis eorum, qui cohaerent uerbo dei et non diligunt mundum, cuius ille princeps est, quia dominatur eis, qui diligunt temporalia bona, quae hoc mundo uisibili continentur, non quia ipse dominus est huius mundi, sed princeps cupiditatum earum, quibus concupiscitur omne quod transit, ut ei subiaceant qui neglegunt aeternum deum et diligunt instabilia et mutabilia’; trans. Russell, p. 316.

you will see him who made the world: and just as he conquered, so also you, in his grace, will conquer this world'.<sup>13</sup>

Augustine reads John in light of other New Testament passages. Consider, for example, the fourth chapter of the Epistle of James. The author accuses his audience of bringing about contention and strife through concupiscence for worldly goods. James rebukes them as follows: 'know you not that the friendship of this world is hostile to God? Whoever therefore wishes to be a friend of this age is made an enemy of God.'<sup>14</sup> A similar notion is expressed in 1 John 2:15–17, which Augustine cites when explaining that a man should not 'love in his wife the concupiscence of the flesh which he ought not to love even in himself'.<sup>15</sup> Translated literally, Augustine's version of the passage follows:

Do not love the world or the things that are in the world: if anyone loves the world, the charity of the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the ambition of the age, which is not from the Father, but from the world. And the world will pass away, and its concupiscence: but whoever does the will of God remains forever, just as God remains forever.<sup>16</sup>

Christian charity, the love of God, demands detachment from worldly successes and pleasures. To love the world, then, is to lack the charity of the heavenly Father and to pursue the concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life. The Father created the world; He did not create the threefold concupiscence that originates in the Fall and the Devil's seduction.

Pope St Gregory the Great builds on the positive relation between God and those who despise the world. For Gregory, to be loved by God or to love God means to hold the world as of no account in comparison with God. Thus Gregory introduces the *Dialogues* by relating his anxiety-wracked efforts to set aside worldly affairs and to keep his mind on heavenly realities.

Sometimes my sorrow is increased when the life of certain men, who wholeheartedly left behind the present age and abandoned this wicked world (*praesens saeculum tota mente reliquerunt*), is recalled to my remembrance. When I behold their height, I recognise that I lie in the depth. Many of them pleased their creator by a more retired life; lest through

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 216 (PL 38: 1077): 'si despicitis mundum, habebitis cor mundum, et uidebitis eum qui fecit mundum: et sicut ille uicit, ita et uos in eius gratia uincetis hunc mundum', my translation.

<sup>14</sup> James 4:4: 'nescitis quia amicitia huius mundi inimica est Dei quicumque ergo voluerit amicus esse saeculi huius inimicus Dei constituitur'. *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969), my translation.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* I.18.20 (PL 44: 425): 'Absit ergo ut fidelis homo (*Coloss.* III, 19), cum audit ab Apostolo, *Diligite uxores vestras*, concupiscentiam carnis diligat in uxore, quam nec in se ipso debet diligere, audiens alterum apostolum'; trans. Roland J. Teske, *Answer to the Pelagians*, vol. 2, WSA I/24 (Hyde Parke, NY: New City Press, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. I.18.20 (PL 44: 425): 'Nolite diligere mundum, nec ea quae in mundo sunt: quisquis dilexerit mundum, non est charitas Patris in illo; quia omnia quae in mundo sunt, concupiscentia carnis est, et concupiscentia oculorum, et ambitio saeculi, quae non est a Patre, sed ex mundo est. Et mundus transibit et concupiscentia ejus: qui autem fecerit voluntatem Dei, manet in aeternum, sicut et Deus manet in aeternum', my translation.

human affairs they become old, losing newness of mind, the omnipotent God did not wish them to be occupied with the labors of this world.<sup>17</sup>

Gregory's desire to preserve virtue by abandoning the world markedly contrasts with the quotidian human affairs in which he is constantly embroiled. In light of this passionate introduction, all four books of the *Dialogues* appear as an examination of conscience whereby Gregory compares his own life with the virtues of holy men who forsake the world and its affairs.

Gregory strikingly evokes this theme with the verb *despicere* at several significant junctures in the *Dialogues*. For example, in his introductory summary of St Benedict's life, Gregory praises the holy monk as follows: 'he gave his soul to no pleasure, but while he was still on this earth, he despised the world in its flower (*despexit . . . mundum cum flore*), which he could have enjoyed freely for a time, as if already withered'.<sup>18</sup> Gregory especially prizes the disposition of detachment from worldly goods.<sup>19</sup> He summarises the virtues of one Constantius, renowned for his sanctity, who, 'utterly despising worldly things (*funditus terrena despiciens*), with the entire effort of his mind was inflamed with passion for heavenly things alone'.<sup>20</sup>

Another saintly model Gregory proposes in his *Dialogues* is the priest Sanctulus. Sanctulus demonstrates that, properly understood, despising the world is by no means incompatible with the love of one's neighbour. Thus he exchanged his own life for the life of a deacon whom the Lombards intended to execute.

Do not marvel at anything concerning Sanctulus, but consider, if you can, what was that spirit that gripped his so simple mind, and elevated it to such a summit of virtue. For where was his soul, when he with such constancy resolved to die for his neighbor, and for the temporal life of one brother despised his own (*despexit suam*), and stretched out his neck under the sword? What power of love gripped that heart, which did not dread its own death for the safety of one neighbor?<sup>21</sup>

Significantly, Gregory closes his third book of *Dialogues* with a final exhortation to despise the world, particularly in light of the great calamities suffered in his own time:

<sup>17</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri quatuor* I.prol.6 (*Sources Chrétiennes* [=SC] 260: 14): 'Nonnumquam uero ad augmentum mei doloris adiungitur, quod quorundam uita, qui praesens saeculum tota mente reliquerunt, mihi ad memoriam reuocatur, quorum dum culmen aspicio, quantum ipse in infimis iaceam agnosco. Quorum plurimi conditori suo in secretiori uita placuerunt, qui ne per humanos actus a nouitate mentis ueterescerent, eos omnipotens Deus huius mundi laboribus noluit occupari', my translation.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. II.prol.1 (SC 260: 126): 'nulli animum uoluptati dedit, sed dum in hac terra adhuc esset, quo temporaliter libere uti potuisset, despexit iam quasi aridum mundum cum flore', my translation.

<sup>19</sup> Adalbert de Vogüé, *Grégoire le grand, Dialogues*, vol. 1, *Introduction, bibliographie et cartes*, Sources Chrétiennes 251 (Paris: Cerf, 1978), p. 96: 'La foi héroïque des martyrs et des confesseurs . . . s'apparente à une autre disposition que Grégoire prise hautement : le détachement à l'égard des choses d'ici-bas — propriété, mariage, gloire — et le désir des biens éternels'.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri quatuor* I.5.2 (SC 260: 58): 'quia isdem uir, funditus terrena despiciens, toto adnusu mentis ad sola caelestia flagrabat', my translation.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. II.37.18 (SC 260: 424): 'Nihil in hac re in Sanctulo mireris, sed pensa, si potes, quis ille spiritus fuerit, qui eius tam simplicem mentem tenuit, atque in tanto uirtutis culmine erexit. Vbi enim eius animus fuit, quando mori pro proximo tam constanter decreuit, et pro temporali uita fratris unius despexit suam, atque sub gladio ceruicem tetendit? Quae ergo uis amoris illud cor tenuit, quod mortem suam pro unius salute proximi non expauit?', my translation.

Surely this world ought to have been despised (*despiciendus . . . hic mundus fuerat*) by us, even if it allured and caressed the soul with desired things. Yet when it is so stricken with scourges, so exhausted with adversity, that it daily multiplies sorrows for us, what does it cry to us but that it should not be loved?<sup>22</sup>

The more miserable one's experience on earth, the easier it should be — and the more comforting — to look down upon earthly things and up to heavenly realities.

The fundamentals of the Catholic spirit or worldview are at stake. One perceives this readily when Gregory rhetorically asks, 'Would the holy apostles and martyrs of Christ have despised the present life (*praesentem uitam despicerent*) and placed their souls in the death of the flesh if they had not known that a more certain life of [their] souls would follow?'<sup>23</sup> Belief in the eternal life of the soul underlies the attitude indicated by *despicere* toward the present life that makes martyrdom possible. It also frees the Christian soul from slavery to the vicissitudes of worldly fortunes.

Gregory powerfully illustrates this point with the story of Hermenegild, son of the Arian Visigothic king Leovigild. Hermenegild was deprived of his kingdom and put in chains by his father on account of his conversion to the Catholic faith:

And so this young king Hermenegild, despising the earthly kingdom (*terrenum regnum despiciens*) and seeking heaven with strong desire (*forti desiderio caeleste quaerens*), began to lie bound in hair-cloth, to pour forth prayers to almighty God to send him comfort, and to despise so much the more nobly the glory of this transitory world (*gloriam transeuntis mundi despiciere*), in so far as, while bound, he recognised that nothing could be taken away from him.<sup>24</sup>

Gregory then relates Hermenegild's martyrdom: 'as soon as they entered [the prison], driving an axe into his brain they took away the life of his body; and they were able to destroy in him that very thing that he who was destroyed had also determined to despise (*despexisse*) in himself'.<sup>25</sup> Gregory's treatment of Hermenegild is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the language regarding the fading glory of the world is scriptural: for example, it appears in Isaiah 40:6–7 and Ecclesiasticus 14:18. Moreover, the lines from Isaiah 40 are quoted in 1 Peter 1:24, and James 1:10 alludes to them as well. The notion of despising the world in its flower also appears in Gregory's introduction to the life of Benedict, cited above. Second, the language with which Gregory portrays Hermenegild's attitude and prayer regarding the world reappears in later liturgical prayers, as will be demonstrated below.

Other examples could be cited to demonstrate how fundamental the notion of despising the world is to the Christian attitude as expressed by the Latin fathers of

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. II.38.4 (SC 260: 430): 'Despiciendus a nobis hic mundus fuerat, etiam si blandiretur, si rebus prosperis demulceret animum. At postquam tot flagellis premitur, tanta aduersitate fatigatur, tot nobis cotidie dolores ingeminat, quid nobis aliud quam ne diligatur clamat?', my translation.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. IV.6.1 (SC 265: 38–40): 'Numquidnam sancti apostoli et martyres Christi praesentem uitam despicerent, in morte carnis animas ponerent, nisi certiores animarum uitam subsequi scirent?', my translation.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. II.31.2 (SC 260: 384–386): 'Coepit itaque isdem Herminigildus rex iuuenis, terrenum regnum despiciens et forti desiderio caeleste quaerens, in ciliciis iacere uinculatus, omnipotenti Deo ad confortandum se preces effundere, tantoque sublimius gloriam transeuntis mundi despiciere, quanto et religatus agnouerat nihil fuisse quod potuit auferri', my translation.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. II.31.4 (SC 260: 386): 'Nam mox ut ingressi sunt, securem cerebro illius infigentes, uitam corporis abstrulerunt, hocque in eo ualuerunt perimere, quod ipsum quoque qui peremptus est in se constiterat despexisse', my translation.



the Church with the word *despicere*.<sup>26</sup> The evidence already cited, however, suffices to place the notion and the word itself in the larger context of the Latin tradition up to the period during which the earliest liturgical books were produced.

## The disposition of the martyr, the confessor, and the faithful

The extent to which a martyr such as Hermenegild despises worldly glories in his properly ordered preference for celestial glories is obvious. Anyone who is willing to sacrifice all earthly pleasures and successes for the faith comparatively despises the former in his love for the latter. Such an attitude, evoked with the word *despicere*, should characterise the disposition not only of martyrs, but of all Christians. It is perhaps for this reason that a verbal correspondence with Gregory's treatment of Hermenegild appears in the traditional Magnificat antiphon from a common for a confessor.

### Antiphon at Magnificat

#### II Vespers, Common of a Confessor not a Bishop

Hic vir, despiciens mundum et terrena, triumphans, divitias caelo condidit ore, manu. <sup>27</sup>	This man is triumphant; despising the world and earthly things, he stored up treasures in heaven by word, by deed. <sup>28</sup>
---	--

This formula resonates verbally with one particular sentence in which Gregory discusses Hermenegild: 'isdem uir . . . terrena despiciens . . . ad sola caelestia flagrabat'.<sup>29</sup> The text of the antiphon was fixed by the time of Paschasius Radbertus, who cites it in his commentary on Lamentations as an 'epitaph' with which he presumes his reader is familiar.<sup>30</sup> Since Paschasius died around the year 860, the antiphon cannot be later than the ninth century. Its placement in the common of a confessor ensured that those who prayed the divine office regularly knew it well.

The words of the Gospel echo in this antiphon, as they do in Gregory's *Dialogues*: 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Mt 6:21).<sup>31</sup> Every Christian is

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo CXCVI* 5 (CCSL 104: 794): 'Unde iterum rogo, ut occupationes saeculi huius in istis diebus sanctae Quadragesimae, si non potestis abscondere, studeatis vel ex parte aliqua temperare: ut pretioso damno et gloriosissimo fructu hoc saeculum fugientes subtrahatis aliquis horas occupationi terrenaе, in quibus deo vacare possitis. Nam iste mundus aut ridet de nobis, aut ridetur a nobis: aut adquiescimus, et despici-mur, aut contemnimus, ut aeterna praemia consequamur; ac sic aut contemnis et despicias mundum, aut adquiescis, et premeris vel calcaris a mundo.' Also Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula XXIII* 23 (CSEL 29: 180): 'inluminatur autem anima tali caecitate, qua despicit mundum, ut conspiciat deum. quia omne, inquit, quod in mundo est, concupiscentia oculorum est', citing 1 Jn 2:16.

<sup>27</sup> Ant. Magn., II Vespers, Common of a Confessor not a Bishop, ed. and trans. in *The Monastic Diurnal or The Day Hours of the Monastic Breviary in Latin and English*, 2nd edn (Mechlin: Dessain, 1952), p. 93; Ad Magnif. ant., Commune confessoris non pontificis, *Diurnale Romanum* [from the *Breviarium Romanum*] (Preserving Christian Publications, 2008) p. 37\*.

<sup>28</sup> My translation.

<sup>29</sup> See note 20.

<sup>30</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in lamentationes Hieremiae* II.1, ed. Beda Paulus, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 85 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1988), p. 80, l. 89: 'Siquidem et ex manu oris que eloquio zelo iustitiae reconduntur uti bene quidam de aliquo epitafium condens: *Hic uir inquit despiciens mundum et terrena triumphans diuitias caelo condidit ore manu.*'

<sup>31</sup> See also Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 12:33–34; Lk 18:22; cf. Lk 12:21; Jas 5:3.



called to triumph in spiritual battle over worldly goods, laying up treasures not on earth but in heaven. The faithful, following the example of holy martyrs and confessors, demonstrate the attitude of despising the world through a lifetime of words and deeds that foster, reflect, and stem from a longing for the riches of heaven. The easy transition from the disposition of heart that characterises the martyr's attitude to the disposition that ought to characterise all Christians has never been lost in the liturgical tradition. In many ways it is summarised and preserved in phrases such as *despicere mundum et terrena*.

Given the close connection throughout history between the divine office and the Mass, it is apropos to dwell upon this Magnificat antiphon in order to elucidate the motif evoked by *despicere* in the missal. This particular antiphon also connects the use of the verb in the Latin fathers, through Gregory the Great, to the tradition of fixed Latin liturgical texts. Now the context is set for studying the relevant orations from the Mass.

### The motif in the *Missale Romanum* from 1570 to 1962

The motif of despising the world appears on numerous occasions with the verb *despicere* in the Missal of Blessed John XXIII, that is, the typical edition of the *Missale Romanum* promulgated in 1962. The verb occurs mainly in the proper of saints, but its most conspicuous placement is in the postcommunion of the Second Sunday of Advent.

Postcommunion, Second Sunday of Advent

*Missale Romanum* of 1962 and 1570

Repleti cibo spiritualis alimoniae,	Full-fed with the food of spiritual
supplices te, Domine, deprecamur: ut	nourishment, humbly we beseech you,
hujus participatione mysterii, doceas	Lord: by participation in this mystery,
nos terrena despicere et amare	teach us to despise earthly realities and to
caelestia. <sup>32</sup>	love celestial realities. <sup>33</sup>

This oration is rather prominent, appearing as it does in the second Mass formulary of the liturgical year. Numerous manuscripts from locations throughout Western Europe contain it, the earliest of which date to the eighth and ninth centuries, including the mixed Gelasian and the Gregorian of the Hadrianum type.<sup>34</sup> It was then incorporated into the first printed edition of the *Missale Romanum* in 1474<sup>35</sup> and all editions following the Council of Trent beginning in 1570. No variants in any of these sources omit the word *despicere*.

The ancient postcommunion of the second Sunday of Advent beseeches that the Lord teach the faithful to despise what is earthly and to love what is heavenly. The

<sup>32</sup> Postcommunio, Dominica secunda adventus, *Missale Romanum*, editio iuxta typicam (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1962) [=MR1962], p. 2; Postcommunio, Dominica secunda de adventu, *Missale Romanum*, editio princeps (1570), ed. Manlio Sodi and Achille Maria Triacca (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998) [=MR1570], p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> My translation.

<sup>34</sup> *Oratio* 5044b, ed. Eugenio Moeller, Ioanne Maria Clément, and Bertrandus Coppieters 'T. Wallant, *Corpus orationum*, vol. 8, *Orationes 4955–5538*, CCSL 160G (Turnholt: Brepols, 1996), p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> P. Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel Romain, texte et histoire*, 2 vols, *Études Liturgiques* 1 (Louvain: Contre du Documentation et d'Information Liturgiques, 1952), vol. 1, p. 2, §3; vol. 2, pp. 280–81, §970.

contrasting of the verb *amare* or ‘to love’ with the object *caelestia* or ‘celestial things’ reveals the rationale for looking down upon earthly things. Thus the phrasing of the petition takes the form of a complementary antithesis that is necessary for grasping the meaning of *despicere*: one despises worldly realities precisely for the sake of loving heavenly realities.

Another oration present in all the Roman missals from 1570 to 1962, the collect for St Denis or Dionysius and companions, strikingly demonstrates the same logic. This formula explicitly indicates that the faithful seek to despise worldly realities for the sake of better loving God.

Collect, Sts Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius

*Missale Romanum* of 1962 and 1570

Deus, qui hodierna die beatum Dionysium Martyrem tuum atque Pontificem, virtute constantiae in passione roborasti, quique illi, ad praedicandum gentibus gloriam tuam, Rusticum et Eleutherium sociare dignatus es: tribue nobis, quaesumus; eorum imitatio, pro amore tuo prospera mundi despiciere, et nulla eius adversa formidare. <sup>36</sup>	O God, who on this day strengthened your blessed martyr and bishop Denis with the virtue of constancy in suffering, and who deigned to associate Rusticus and Eleutherius with him for preaching your glory to the nations: grant us, we beseech; by their example, for love of you to despise the favorable circumstances of the world and to fear none of its adversities. <sup>37</sup>
--	--

This collect for Sts Denis, Rusticus, and Eleutherius can be traced back to the tenth century. Incorporated into the 1474 edition of the *Missale Romanum*, it reappears in all the Roman missals from 1570 to 1962.<sup>38</sup> The petition is marked by antithesis, although once again the terms involved clearly are not opposites but complements. The love of God is fostered and strengthened when the Christian habitually disregards or despises worldly prosperity and fears no worldly adversity. The Christian seeks to cultivate a disregard for earthly prosperity or adversity because that attitude fosters divine love.

The relevant phrase with which the collect for St Denis and companions ends, ‘pro amore tuo prospera mundi despiciere, et nulla eius adversa formidare’, appears word for word in the collect of the feast of the Roman martyr St Hermes, formerly celebrated on 28 August.

Collect, St Hermes

*Missale Romanum* of 1962 and 1570

Deus, qui beatum Hermetem Martyrem tuum virtute constantiae in passione roborasti: ex ejus nobis imitatione tribue; pro amore tuo prospera mundi despiciere, et nulla ejus adversa formidare. <sup>39</sup>	God, who strengthened your blessed martyr Hermes with the virtue of constancy in suffering: grant us, following his example, for your love to despise the good fortunes of this world and to dread none of its adversities. <sup>40</sup>
--	--

<sup>36</sup> Oratio, Die 9 Octobris, Ss Dionysii Ep. Rustici et Eleutherii, MR1962, p. 702; Oratio, In festo sanctorum martyrum Dionysii, Rustici et Eleutherii, MR1570, p. 552.

<sup>37</sup> My translation.

<sup>38</sup> Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, vol. 1, pp. 153–54, §442; vol. 2, p. 82, §292.

<sup>39</sup> Oratio, Die 28 Augusti, S. Hermetis, MR1962, p. 657; MR1570, p. 537.

<sup>40</sup> My translation.

This oration appears in ninth-century manuscripts and is found also in the printed Roman missals published between 1474 and 1962.<sup>41</sup>

Another closely related prayer is the collect for St Hermenegild. His collect shares the same incipit, *Deus qui beatum*, as the orations for Denis and Hermes, and all three contain the word *despicere*.

Collect, St Hermenegild

*Missale Romanum* of 1962

Deus, qui beatum Hermenegildum	O God, who taught your blessed martyr
Martyrem tuum caelesti regno terrenum	Hermenegild to disregard the earth for the
postponere docuisti: da, quaesumus, nobis;	heavenly kingdom: grant us, we beseech,
eius exemplo caduca despiciere, atque	by his example to despise transitory things
aeterna sectari. <sup>42</sup>	and to pursue eternal things. <sup>43</sup>

In this oration, the faithful pray for the grace, in keeping with the example of St Hermenegild, to despise *caduca*, meaning ‘fallen things’ as well as ‘things transitory’ or ‘perishable’. Although this is the same saint of whom Gregory the Great writes, his feast day was added to the universal calendar under Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644).<sup>44</sup> Hermenegild’s formulary, therefore, is not found in *Missale Romanum* of 1570 (henceforth MR1570).

Here is a first indication of organic development in the prayers of the Roman Mass published between 1570 and 1962. During this period, the motif of despising the world was retained, the Church continually and increasingly recognised its value, and the euchology of the missal was enriched accordingly. Numerous orations were added that feature *despicere* in the complementary antithesis under consideration. These include: the collect of Holy Abbot Sylvester;<sup>45</sup> the collect of St Casimir;<sup>46</sup> the collect of St Paulinus, which contains an allusion to Matthew 19:29;<sup>47</sup> the collect of Pope St Peter Celestine;<sup>48</sup> the collect of St Philip Benizi;<sup>49</sup> the collect of St

<sup>41</sup> Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, vol. 1, p. 139, §394; vol. 2, p. 82, §292.

<sup>42</sup> Oratio, Die 13 Aprilis, S. Hermenegildi Martyris, MR1962, p. 508.

<sup>43</sup> My translation.

<sup>44</sup> Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, vol. 1, pp. 91–92, §238; vol. 2, p. 82, §291.

<sup>45</sup> Oratio, Die 26 Novembris, S. Silvestri abbatis, MR1962, p. 747: ‘Clementissime Deus, qui sanctum Silvestrum Abbatem, saeculi huius vanitatem in aperto tumultu pie meditantem, ad eremum vocare, et praeclaris vitae meritis decorare dignatus es: te supplices exoramus; ut, eius exemplo terrena despicientes, tui consortio perfruamur aeterno. Per Dominum.’

<sup>46</sup> Oratio, Die 4 Martii, S. Casimiri Confessoris, MR1962, p. 487: ‘Deus, qui inter regales delicias et mundi illecebras, sanctum Casimirum virtute constantiae roborasti: quaesumus; ut eius intercession fideles tui terrena despiciant, et ad caelestia semper aspirent. Per Dominum.’

<sup>47</sup> Oratio, Die 22 Iunii, S. Paulini episcopi et confessoris, MR1962, p. 571: ‘Deus, qui omnia pro te in hoc saeculo relinquentibus, centuplum in futuro et vitam aeternam promissisti: concede propitius; ut, sancti Pontificis Paulini vestigiis inhaerentes, valeamus terrena despiciere, et sola caelestia desiderare: Qui vivis.’

<sup>48</sup> Oratio, Die 19 Maii, S. Petri Caelestini papae et confessoris, MR1962, p. 539: ‘Deus, qui beatum Petrum Caelestinum ad summi pontificatus apicem sublimasti, quique illum humiliati postponere docuisti: concede propitius; ut eius exemplo cuncta mundi despiciere, et ad promissa humilibus praemia pervenire feliciter mereamur. Per Dominum.’

<sup>49</sup> Oratio, Die 23 Augusti, S. Philippi Benitii conf., MR1962, p. 653: ‘Deus, qui per beatum Philippum Confessorem tuum, eximum nobis humilitatis exemplum tribuisti: da famulis tuis prospera mundi ex eius imitatio despiciere, et caelestia semper inquirere. Per Dominum.’

Elizabeth;<sup>50</sup> the postcommunion of St Jane Francis de Chantal;<sup>51</sup> the postcommunion of St Catharine Catharina Flisca Adurna of Genoa;<sup>52</sup> the secret of the votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Consolation;<sup>53</sup> and the postcommunion of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Two such later orations serve as representative examples: those from the formularies of St Joseph and Sts Cyril and Methodius.

Consider first the postcommunion for the feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius in MR1962:

Postcommunion, Sts Cyril and Methodius

*Missale Romanum* of 1962

Quaesumus, omnipotens Deus: ut, qui	We beseech, almighty God: that you who
nobis munera dignaris praeberere	deign to bestow celestial gifts, by the
caelestia, intercedentibus sanctis tuis	intercessions of your saints Cyril and
Cyrillo et Methodio, despiciere terrena	Methodius, may grant that we despise
concedas. <sup>55</sup>	earthly things. <sup>56</sup>

This prayer openly requests that the faithful be granted the ability to despise worldly things. The heavenly gifts they should prefer are mentioned in the *qui* clause embedded in the *ut* clause. The oration is of relatively recent composition. Texts for the proper of Sts Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles to the Slavs, do not appear in the MR1570. Their feast was added to the universal calendar by Pope Leo XIII in 1880,<sup>57</sup> and the propers for the celebration were printed in the *Missale Romanum* promulgated in 1908.<sup>58</sup>

The second example of a more recent oration is drawn from the feast of the patronage of St Joseph, to be celebrated on the third Sunday after Easter. Blessed

<sup>50</sup> Oratio, Die 19 Novembris, S. Elisabeth viduae, MR1962, p. 741: 'Tuorum corda fidelium, Deus miserator, illustra: et, beatae Elisabeth precibus gloriosis; fac nos prospera mundi despiciere, et caelesti semper consolatione gaudere. Per Dominum.' Cf. Oratio, Die 15 Iunii, Ss Viti, Modesti atque Crescentiae, MR1962, p. 564: 'Da Ecclesiae tuae, quaesumus, Domine, sanctis Martyribus tuis Vito, Modesto atque Crescentia intercedentibus, superbe non sapere, sed tibi placita humilitate proficere: ut, prava despiciens, quaecumque recta sunt, libera exerceat caritate'. This oration is also found in manuscripts dating back to the eighth century and the Roman Missals of 1474 and 1570: see Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, vol. 1, pp. 107–8, §298; vol. 2, p. 48, §155.

<sup>51</sup> Postcommunio, Die 21 Augusti, S. Ioannae Franciscæ Fremiot de Chantal viduae, MR1962, p. 650: 'Spiritus nobis, Domine, tuae caritatis infunde: ut, quos caelestis panis virtute satiasti, beata Ioanna Francisca intercedente, facias terrena despiciere, et te solum Deum pura mente sectari. Per Dominum'.

<sup>52</sup> Postcommunio, Die 15 Septembris, S. Catharinae Fliscae Adurnae, MR1962, p. 212: 'Supplices te rogamus, omnipotens Deus: ut, quos tuis reficere dignatus es sacramentis, intercedente beata Catharina, tribuas pro tui amore terrena despiciere: et caelestium semper participatione gaudere. Per Dominum'.

<sup>53</sup> Secreta, Beatae Mariae Virginis de Consolatione, MR1962, p. 205: 'Suscipe, Domine, munus, quod tibi offerimus, memoriam recolentes purissimae Virginis Mariae, quae consolatur nos in omni tribulatione nostra: et praesta; ut mens nostra superno lumine Spiriti Sanctus irradiata, terrena despiciat, et ad caelestia semper aspiret. Per Dominum'.

<sup>54</sup> Postcommunio, In festo sacratissimi cordis Iesu, MR1962, p. 378: 'Praebeat nobis, Domine Iesu, divinum tua sancta fervorem: quo dulcissimi Cordis tui suavitate percepta, discamus terrena despiciere, et amare caelestia: Qui vivis'.

<sup>55</sup> Postcommunio, Die 7 Iulii, Ss Cyrilli et Methodii episcoporum et confessorum, MR1962, p. 595.

<sup>56</sup> My translation.

<sup>57</sup> Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical on Ss Cyril and Methodius *Grande munus* (30 September 1880); Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, vol. 1, p. 116, §323.

<sup>58</sup> Die 7. Iulii, Ss Cyrilli et Methodii, *Missale Romanum* (Rome: Typis Societatis S. Joannis Evang., 1908), pp. 515–16.

Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) extended this feast to the entire Church. Pertinent to the present study is the secret *Sanctissimae Genetricis*:

Patronage of St Joseph

*Missale Romanum* of 1908

Sanctissimae Genetricis tuae Sponsi	Supported by the patronage of the Spouse
patrocinio suffulti, rogamus, Domine,	of Thy most holy Mother, we pray Thee,
clementiam tuam: ut corda nostra	O Lord, for Thy mercy; that Thou
facias terrena cuncta despiciere ac te	wouldst make our hearts despise all things
verum Deum perfecta caritate	earthly and love Thee, the true God, with
diligere. <sup>59</sup>	perfect charity. <sup>60</sup>

The faithful pray once again to gain the habit of despising the things of earth for the sake of perfecting their love of God. In MR1962, this oration, along with its entire formulary, appears in a votive Mass for Wednesdays in honour of St Joseph.<sup>61</sup> Outside the Mass, this oration nourished private devotion to St Joseph, which the magisterium encouraged by endowing it with a plenary indulgence.<sup>62</sup>

This section chronicled sixteen orations of MR1962 that juxtapose an attitude of looking down upon or despising things of the world, expressed by the verb *despicere*, with the love of God or of heavenly realities. An analysis of several of these formulae reveals that the phrases juxtaposed constitute a complementary antithesis. They implicitly contrast love of the world with love of God by specifically requesting an attitude of disdain for the world. The attitude expressed by *despicere* is not an end in itself; it entails a freedom from disordered desires and the vicissitudes of worldly fortunes that serves, complements, and makes possible the love of God and the longing for the fulfilment of his promises in heaven.

## The motif in the *Missale Romanum* from 1970

In the orations of the first, second, and third typical editions of the *Missale Romanum* of, respectively, 1970, 1975, and 2002, the verb *despicere* occurs only once in connection with the world or anything pertaining to it.<sup>63</sup> The case in point is the collect of feast of St Denis and companions.

<sup>59</sup> Secreta, Dominica III post Pascha, Patrocinii S. Joseph, MR1908, pp. 462–63.

<sup>60</sup> Translation from *The Raccolta: Prayers and Devotions Enriched with Indulgences* (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2004; reprint of 1957 edition), §479, p. 367.

<sup>61</sup> Secreta, Feria IV Missa de S. Ioseph, MR1962, p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> See *The Raccolta*, §479, p. 367.

<sup>63</sup> The word *despicere* appears in only two other places in the third typical edition, according to the *Concordantia et indices* Missalis Romani, editio typica tertia, ed. Manlio Sodi and Alessandro Toniolo, Monumenta Studia Instrumenta Liturgica 23 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), p. 497. Each of these occurrences is in an antiphon taken from a Psalm: Ant. ad communionem, Pro captivitate detentis, Missa et orationes pro variis necessitatibus vel ad diversa, MR2002, p. 1145 (from Ps 68:31, 34): ‘Laudabo nomen Dei cum cantico, et magnificabo eum in laude. Quoniam exaudivit pauperes Dominus, et vinctos suos non despexit’; Ant. ad introitum, Dominica XI « per annum », MR2002, p. 461 (from Ps 26:7, 9): ‘Exaudi, Domine, vocem meam, qua clamavi ad te. Adiutor meus esto, ne derelinquas me, neque despicias me, Deus salutaris meus.’

Deus, qui beatum Dionysium eiusque socios ad praedicandam gentibus gloriam tuam misisti, eosque virtute constantiae in passione roborasti, tribue nobis, quaesumus, ex eorum imitatione prospera mundi despiciere, et nulla eius adversa formidare.<sup>64</sup>

O God, who sent blessed Denis and his companions to proclaim your glory to the nations, and who strengthened them with the virtue of constancy in suffering, grant us, we beseech, by imitation of them to despise the favorable circumstances of the world and to fear none of its adversities.<sup>65</sup>

Although the formula has been altered — for example, the names of Rusticus and Eleutherius are omitted — the phrase *prospera mundi despiciere* is copied directly from its predecessor in the pre-Vatican II *Missale Romanum*. Given the status of this feast as an optional memorial in most of the world, it is more than likely that most practising Catholics, especially those outside France, will never be exposed to it.

All other orations containing this or similar phrases in MR1962 and its predecessors have been altered or replaced so that the motif no longer appears, at least with the word *despiciere*. Consider, for example, the postcommunion oration for the second Sunday of Advent in the Missal of Paul VI, here juxtaposed in the newer and the older forms:

*Missale Romanum* 1970

Repleti cibo spiritualis alimoniae, supplices te, Domine, deprecamur, ut, huius participatione mysterii, doceas nos terrena sapienter perpendere, et caelestibus inhaerere.<sup>66</sup>

Full-fed with the food of spiritual nourishment, humbly we beseech you, Lord: by participation in this mystery, teach us to weigh wisely earthly realities and to adhere to celestial realities.<sup>68</sup>

*Missale Romanum* 1570 and 1962

Repleti cibo spiritualis alimoniae, supplices te, Domine, deprecamur: ut huius participatione mysterii, doceas nos terrena despiciere et amare caelestia.<sup>67</sup>

Full-fed with the food of spiritual nourishment, humbly we beseech you, Lord: by participation in this mystery, teach us to despise earthly realities and to love celestial realities.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Collecta, Die 9 octobris, Ss Dionysii, episcopo, et sociorum, martyrum, MR2002, p. 845. The prayer is exactly the same in the typical edition of 1970: *Missale Romanum*, editio typica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970) [=MR1970], p. 623. Cf. ICEL's translation in *The Sacramentary Approved for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1985) [=Sacramentary (1985)], p. 719: 'Father, you sent St Denis and his companions to preach your glory to the nations, and you gave them the strength to be steadfast in their sufferings for Christ. Grant that we may learn from their example to reject the power and wealth of this world and to brave all earthly trials'.

<sup>65</sup> My translation. Cf. the translation by Martin D. O'Keefe, in *Oremus: Speaking with God in the Words of the Roman Rite* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), p. 162: 'God our Father, you sent Saint Denis and his companions to proclaim your wonders to the nations, and you strengthened them with the virtue of perseverance in the midst of suffering. Please grant that, in imitation of them, we may spurn the riches of the world and fear none of its enmity'. In his preface (p. v), O'Keefe explains that, on the basis of the Latin texts, he has attempted to produce 'as accurate and as dignified an English version as possible, granting the inherent differences between the two languages'.

<sup>66</sup> Postcommunio, Dominica secunda adventus, MR1970, p. 130.

<sup>67</sup> Postcommunio, Dominica secunda adventus, MR1962, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> My translation.

<sup>69</sup> My translation.

Although closely related to its predecessor in the Missal of Blessed John XXIII, the later oration is altered at precisely the point where the ancient spiritual theme indicated by *despicere* appears. Rather than beseeching the Lord to be taught to despise earthly things, the faithful now beseech the ability to wisely weigh earthly things. These notions are closely related, compatible, and in no way opposed. Omitted, however, is the overwhelming certainty that to wisely judge earthly things is indeed to despise them in relation to divine realities.

Another example comes from the memorial of St Francis of Assisi. These columns juxtapose the collects from the feast of St Francis in the *Missale Romanum* before and after the revisions following the Second Vatican Council:

*Missale Romanum* 1962 and 1570

Deus, qui Ecclesiam tuam beati Francisci  
meritis foetu novae prolis amplificas:  
tribue nobis; ex eius imitatione, terrena  
despicere, et caelestium donorum semper  
participatione gaudere.<sup>70</sup>

O God, who through the merits of blessed  
Francis didst enrich thy Church with a  
new offspring, grant that after his example  
we may despise earthly things and ever  
find joy in partaking of the gifts of  
heaven.<sup>72</sup>

*Missale Romanum* 1970/1975/2002

Deus, qui beato Francisco paupertate et  
humilitate Christo configurari tribuisti,  
concede, ut, per illius semitas gradientes,  
Filium tuum sequi et tibi coniungi laeta  
valeamus caritate.<sup>71</sup>

God our Father, you gave Saint Francis  
the privilege of being made like Christ in  
poverty and lowliness. Grant that,  
treading the same path as he, we may be  
enabled to follow your Son and be united  
with you in joyful love.<sup>73</sup>

This oration of MR1962 first appears with the exact same wording in manuscripts of the fourteenth century,<sup>74</sup> and is then incorporated unchanged into the Roman missals from 1474 to 1570 to 1962.<sup>75</sup> The revised formula of 1970 bears slight resemblance to its predecessor. The earlier prayer asks God to grant that the faithful might imitate St Francis by despising the things of earth and rejoicing through participation in heavenly gifts. In the more recent version, the faithful ask to walk in the saint's footsteps by being conformed to Christ in humility and poverty, following the Son and rejoicing in being bound to God in charity.

Carlo Braga contributed much to the revision of liturgical books, serving on the preparatory commission that produced the draft of *Sacrosanctum concilium* for the fathers of the Second Vatican Council and subsequently on the secretariat of the consilium charged with implementing Council mandates with regard to liturgy.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Oratio, Die 4 Octobris, S. Francisci Conf., MR1962, p. 689.

<sup>71</sup> Collecta, Die 4 Octobris, S. Francisci Assisiensis, MR1970, p. 621. The text of this collect remains the same: it is not changed between 1970 and 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Translation in *The Missal in Latin and English* (London: Burns and Oates, 1962) [=MLE], p. 1165.

<sup>73</sup> O'Keefe, *Oremus*, p. 160.

<sup>74</sup> Oratio 1561, ed. Eugenio Moeller, Ioanne Maria Clément, and Bertrandus Coppieters 'T. Wallant, *Corpus orationum*, vol. 2D, pars prima, *Orationes 881–1707*, CCSL 160A (Turnholt: Brepols, 1993), p. 309.

<sup>75</sup> Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, vol. 1, p. 152, §434; vol. 2, p. 92, §331.

<sup>76</sup> Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), pp. 15, 53. For an explanation of the Consilium with particular attention to the group responsible for revising proper orations of the Mass, see Lauren Pristas, 'The Orations of the Vatican II Missal: Policies for Revision', *Communio*, 30 (2003), 626–28.



Braga aptly notes that the revised collect remembers St Francis for his poverty, humility, and spiritual joy.<sup>77</sup> Both the revised petition and its predecessor are wholesome and praiseworthy. Nonetheless, a spirituality of despising earthly realities, so blatantly evidenced in St Francis's life of radical asceticism, is less evident. The revised prayer overlooks the struggle with concupiscence and temptation that marks the Church militant, Christian spirituality in general, and the life of St Francis in particular.

Braga cites two other prayers pertinent to this study in order illustrate how the consilium constructed new orations for MR1970 from parts of orations found in its predecessors. The first is from the feast of St Paulinus of Nola. Braga explains that the new collect for Paulinus is an edited version of an older collect for St Gregory Barbarigo (17 July).<sup>78</sup> More significant for present purposes is the fact that the revised collect is entirely unrelated to the previous collect of Paulinus, which contained a *despicere* phrase.

*Missale Romanum 1962*

Deus, qui omnia pro te in hoc saeculo relinquentibus, centuplum in futuro et vitam aeternam promisisti: concede propitius; ut, sancti Pontificis Paulini vestigiis inhaerentes, valeamus terrena despicere, et sola caelestia desiderare.<sup>79</sup>

O God, who have promised a hundredfold reward in the future and eternal life to those who leave all things in this age for your sake: propitiously grant; that, walking in the steps of the holy bishop Paulinus, we might be able to despise earthly things, and to desire celestial things alone.<sup>81</sup>

*Missale Romanum 1970, 2002*

Deus, qui beatum Paulinum episcopum paupertatis amore et pastoralis sollicitudine clarescere voluisti, concede propitius, ut, cuius merita celebramus, caritatis imitemur exempla.<sup>80</sup>

O God, who wished blessed bishop Paulinus to become renowned for love of poverty and pastoral solicitude, propitiously grant, that we may imitate the examples of charity of him whose merits we celebrate.<sup>82</sup>

In short, the collect of St Paulinus found in MR1962 is replaced in MR1970 with an edited version of a formula from a different celebration that contains an entirely distinct petition. The complementary antithesis of despising earthly things and longing for celestial things has been replaced in the petition by a request for charity in imitation of Paulinus. Braga comments that the final phrase of the source prayer had to be corrected 'in light of the new vision of earthly things'.<sup>83</sup> He does not explain of what this new vision consists, or what its sources may be.

<sup>77</sup> Carlo Braga, 'Il "Proprium de sanctis"', *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 84 (1970), 413.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428. MR1962 does not have a formulary for St Gregory Barbarigo.

<sup>79</sup> Oratio, Die 22 Iunii, S. Paulini episcopi et confessoris, MR1962, p. 571.

<sup>80</sup> Collecta, Die 22 iunii, S. Paulini Nolani, episcopi, MR1970, p. 561; the text of this collect remains the same in MR2002, p. 769.

<sup>81</sup> My translation.

<sup>82</sup> My translation; cf. trans. O'Keefe, *Oremus*, 131: 'God our Father, you wished your bishop Saint Paulinus of Nola to be outstanding in his love for poverty and his care for your people. In your kindness, grant that we may imitate the charity of this saint whose good deeds we celebrate today.'

<sup>83</sup> Braga, 'Il "Proprium"', p. 429: 'Inoltre le finale del testo precedente (terrena despicere) aveva bisogno di essere corretto nella luce della nuova visione delle cose terrene.'

The final pertinent oration on which Braga comments is the revised collect of St Wenceslaus. The formula in MR1970, Braga points out, is drawn from the oration considered above for St Hermenegild — on the grounds that Wenceslaus, like Hermenegild, is a holy secular ruler.<sup>84</sup> Since Hermenegild's feast is no longer found in MR1970, this could be a means of preserving one oration from his formulary. Once again, however, the verb *despicere* is removed.

*Missale Romanum* of 1962

Collect of St Hermenegild

Deus, qui beatum Hermenegildum  
Martyrem tuum caelesti regno terrenum  
postponere docuisti: da, quaesumus, nobis;  
ejus exemplo caduca despiciere, atque  
aeterna sectari.<sup>85</sup>

O God, who taught your blessed martyr  
Hermenegild to disregard the earth for the  
heavenly kingdom: grant us, we beseech;  
by his example, to despise transitory  
things and to pursue eternal things.<sup>87</sup>

*Missale Romanum* 1970, 2002

Collect of St Wenceslaus

Deus, qui beatum martyrem Venceslaum  
caelesti regno terrenum postponere  
docuisti, eius precibus concede, ut,  
nosmetipsos abnegantes, tibi toto corde  
adhaerere valeamus.<sup>86</sup>

O God, who taught the blessed martyr  
Saint Wenceslaus to disregard the earth  
for the heavenly kingdom, grant that,  
denying ourselves, we may be able to  
adhere wholeheartedly to you.<sup>88</sup>

The *qui* clause is copied from the collect of Hermenegild, with the name only being changed. The petition in the *ut* clause that follows, however, has been altered so that the faithful beseech the grace not to despise transient things and follow eternal things, but rather to deny themselves and adhere to God wholeheartedly. Braga asserts that this change results in a text that is much more positive and concrete than its predecessor. He points out that this change exemplifies the revised prayers of the proper of saints in so far as it is evangelical and emphasises the attainment of sanctity befitting a secular prince, rather than some generic phrase valid for every type of sanctity.<sup>89</sup>

Braga implies that the revised prayer avoids a phrase that is not applicable to every type of sanctity; but are not all Christians called to deny themselves in order to cling to God with their whole hearts? Self-denial and wholehearted adherence to God certainly reflect an evangelical spirituality, but no more than the notion of despising passing worldly things for the sake of seeking eternal, heavenly things. Braga apparently assumes that a lay Christian cannot despise the world in the same manner as a monk or religious. This assumption was not shared by Gregory the Great, who expressly used the phrase *terrenum . . . despiciens* in reference to this same Hermenegild, a lay Christian and son of a secular king. Robert Bultot, who has devoted more

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 429–30.

<sup>85</sup> Oratio, Die 13 aprilis, S. Hermenegildi Martyris, MR1962, p. 508.

<sup>86</sup> Collecta, Die 28 septembris, S. Venceslai, martyris, MR1970, p. 616; the text of this collect remains the same in MR2002, p. 836.

<sup>87</sup> My translation.

<sup>88</sup> My translation; cf. trans. O'Keefe, *Oremus*, p. 158: 'God our Father, you taught your holy martyr Saint Wenceslaus to value a heavenly kingdom above an earthly one. By his prayers grant that we may deny ourselves and be able to cling to you with our whole hearts.'

<sup>89</sup> Braga, 'Il "Proprium"', p. 430: 'Si nota, però, come la finale è molto più positiva e concreta del testo precedente. Si tratta sempre di correzioni che portano su di un piano evangelico, e sottolineano perciò in forma meglio accessibile l'attuazione della santità, che non una frase generica e valida per ogni tipo di santità.'

erudition than anyone else to studying the Christian history of ‘the ideal of despising the world’, reports that it was a widely held ideal in the Middle Ages even among the laity.<sup>90</sup> All Christians are called to love the things of God and regard worldly goods with a certain detachment, even if only mental or spiritual: ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (Mt 6:21). One cannot invest one’s heart and mind in secular affairs and the kingdom of God at the same time. Even the lay Christian must heed the Lord’s call to store up ‘treasure in heaven’ (Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 12:33, 18:22).

As is the case with the collect of St Wenceslaus, all the orations from MR1962 cited in the previous section have been revised or replaced such that *despicere* no longer appears in them. For example, despite the independent life of the *Sanctissimae genetricis* in private devotions, nothing like this prayer appears in MR1970 — neither in the solemnity of St Joseph on 19 March nor the memorial of St Joseph the worker on 1 May.<sup>91</sup> The final question to investigate is why the motif of *despicere mundum et terrena* has all but disappeared from the MR1970.

## The consilium and the eclipse of *despicere*

The witness of Braga demonstrates that the experts of the consilium who worked on revising the texts of the missal purposefully and systematically removed *despicere* from its orations. One need not doubt their intentions or sincerity, but one may disagree with their stated reasons for doing so and suggest that the effects are less than desirable.

The consilium’s secretary, Annibale Bugnini, explains, ‘Almost all the texts of the old Missal have been used, revised if need be to harmonize them with the reform and the teaching of Vatican II.’<sup>92</sup> Antoine Dumas, who chaired the study group on the consilium charged with revising the orations of the Mass, says something quite similar.<sup>93</sup> In an essay describing the manner in which the consilium produced the revised proper orations of the MR1970, Dumas writes:

Concern for the truth required adaptation in the case of numerous orations ... For example, many texts, for a long while too well known, put heaven and earth into radical opposition — from whence the antithetical couplet oft repeated in the former missal:

<sup>90</sup> Robert Bultot, *La doctrine du mépris du monde, en occident, de s. Ambroise à Innocent III*, vol. 4.2, *Jean de Fécamp, Hermann Contract, Roger de Caen, Anselme de Canterbury* (Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1964), p. 8: ‘La doctrine du mépris du monde est si répandue au moyen âge que prétendre en recueillir toutes les manifestations serait une tâche indéfinie ... l’idéal du mépris du monde n’a pas été au moyen âge le fait des seuls grands contemplatifs: une foule obscure de petits et de sans grade l’ont partagé.’ Bultot’s other studies on the topic include: *La doctrine du mépris du monde, en occident, de s. Ambroise à Innocent III*, vol. 4.1, *Pierre Damien* (Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1963); ‘Anthropologie et spiritualité. A propos du *contemptus mundi* dans l’école de Saint-Victor’, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 51 (1967), 3–22; ‘Bonté des créatures et mépris du monde’, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 62 (1978), 361–94; ‘Cosmologie et *contemptus mundi*’, in *Sapientiae doctrina: mélanges de théologie et de littérature médiévales offerts à Dom Hildebrand Bascour, o. s. b.*, a special number of *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* (1980), 1–23.

<sup>91</sup> Respectively, in MR1970, p. 537 and pp. 546–47.

<sup>92</sup> Bugnini, *Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 396.

<sup>93</sup> Pristas, ‘Orations of the Missal’, p. 627.

*terrena despicere et amare caelestia* which, although a right understanding is possible, is very easily poorly translated. An adaptation was imperative that, without harming the truth, took account of the modern mentality and the directives of Vatican II. Thus the prayer after communion for the second Sunday of Advent quite justifiably says *sapienter perpendere* in place of the word *despicere* which is so often poorly understood.<sup>94</sup>

Thus Dumas demonstrates that he and the other men charged with revising the proper orations of the Mass have a clear bias against phrases containing *despicere*.

Dumas does not explain how the ‘couplet’ in question is inimical to the council. He significantly adds ‘the modern mentality’ to ‘the directives of Vatican II’ in explaining why *despicere* is no longer tenable in liturgical phraseology. The question immediately arises: exactly which teachings of Vatican II require elimination of the verb *despicere* and adaptation of liturgical texts to the modern mentality? Certainly none of the sixteen documents of the council clearly mandate such an alteration of Roman liturgical formulae. It seems likely that Dumas is presupposing a general optimism toward the world and secular culture exhibited in several conciliar documents, and perhaps above all in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*. That same optimism, however, is tempered by the recognition of deep flaws in the fallen modern world in passages such as the following: ‘the world of today (*mundus hodiernus*) is showing both its strength and its weakness, the capacity to produce the best and the worst as it faces the road leading to freedom or to slavery, advance or retreat, fellowship or hatred’.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the convictions that underlie the traditional spiritual and liturgical theme represented by the phrase *despicere mundum* also can be discerned in *Gaudium et spes*. Consider, for example, the following: ‘The church is fully aware that only the God whom it serves corresponds to the deepest hunger of the human heart, which can never be satisfied with earthly nourishment (*nutrimentis terrestribus*)’.<sup>96</sup> One cannot expect to find a full exposition of the spiritual and ascetical notion *despicere mundum* in a document addressed to the whole of humanity.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, the council in no way repudiates the theme, and the orations of the *Missale Romanum* manifestly are not addressed to all humanity.

Dumas also asserts that *despicere* ‘is so often poorly understood’ and ‘very easily poorly translated’.<sup>98</sup> Placide Bruylants, Dumas’s predecessor as chair of the study group that revised the orations, similarly draws attention to the question of translating *despicere*. In a volume dedicated to Giacomo Cardinal Lercaro, the first president of the consilium, Bruylants examines what he considered the problem of the phrase *terrena despicere et amare caelestia*. The word *despicere* in such constructions,

<sup>94</sup> Antoine Dumas, ‘Les oraisons du nouveau Missel’, *Rivista Liturgica*, 1 (1971), 92–101; trans. Pristas, ‘Orations of the Missal’, p. 635.

<sup>95</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), p. 9, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 1074.

<sup>96</sup> *Gaudium et spes* 41, in Tanner, p. 1094.

<sup>97</sup> *Gaudium et spes* 2, in Tanner, p. 1069: ‘ad universos homines’.

<sup>98</sup> In retrospect it is painfully clear that the same could be said of the entire MR1970.

Bruylants argues, presents too many pastoral and catechetical difficulties; it hearkens to an age when the true place of the laity was lost and the models of sanctity were all clerics and religious.<sup>99</sup> In conclusion, Bruylants insists there is no acceptable translation for the expression except *mépriser les choses de la terre* (to have contempt for the things of the earth), and he deems this solution pastorally problematic.<sup>100</sup> To concede Bruylants's point, such a translation can indeed be read in a Manichean sense that contradicts the fundamental Judeo-Christian conviction that God created the world good. Yet the entire ascetical tradition of the Church can be read as Manichean by those who are not well grounded in the faith. Catechists and translators surely can find means to circumvent such false interpretations.

The arguments that Bruylants, Dumas, and Braga articulate against liturgical formulae containing *despicere mundum* or similar phases are largely matters of opinion. They reflect a one-sided reading of the Second Vatican Council which finds little support in a careful reading of the council's documents by generations who have not experienced the euphoria of the 1960s. They demonstrate little confidence in the abilities of catechists and translators to deal with one word. Finally, they hint at a condescending attitude toward Christ's lay faithful — an attitude that laity simply cannot understand this Latin verb or live according to the spirituality it evokes.

Not all assertions are based solely on personal opinion. Bruylants argues on historical grounds that the phrase in question or formulae like it were found only once in the Roman missal before the seventeenth century:

Until the seventeenth century, this formula is found only one time in the Roman Missal, for the purpose that we highlighted above, the collect of the second Sunday of Advent. Since then it has been extended to several feasts of saints, of the blessed Virgin, and finally to that of the Sacred Heart. In effect, the theme ended up transposed from the level of our participation in the redemptive mystery of Christ to that of the imitation of the saints, where, manifestly, clerics and still more, religious, predominate.<sup>101</sup>

This statement is a bit misleading. As demonstrated above, four orations found in the printed Roman missals from 1474 reflect the theme in question with the verb *despicere*. In addition to the second Sunday of Advent, this includes the prayers cited from the feasts of Francis of Assisi, Denis and companions, and Hermes. These prayers and others like them are drawn from a well established and widespread euchological tradition that can be traced to the origins of Latin liturgical books. Furthermore, the use of such formulae multiplies in subsequent centuries under the

<sup>99</sup> Placide Bruylants, 'Terrena despicere et amare caelestia', in *Miscellanea Liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il cardinale Giacomo Lercaro*, vol. 2 (Rome: Desclée, 1967), pp. 205, 198–99. Bruylants refrains from 'une étude théologique du problème' (p. 199), referring instead to Gustave Thils's two-volume *Théologie des réalités terrestres* (Desclée, De Brouwer, 1949), which is more a theoretical attempt at constructing a twentieth-century theology of worldly realities than an inquiry into the traditional piety of despising worldly realities; Bruylants also cites Bultot's *La doctrine de mépris du monde*, as 'en cours de publication'. Bultot's thèse de doctorat was published, or at least material related to it, in various instalments as indicated in note 90.

<sup>100</sup> Bruylants, 'Terrena despicere et amare caelestia', p. 204: 'Au terme de cette étude, il nous paraît clair qu'il n'y a pas de traduction valable pour l'expression *terrena despicere*, sinon *mépriser les choses de la terre*', my translation.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 198, my translation.

initiatives of several popes. Bruylants surely knows this, in light of his own monumental two-volume study of the orations of the *Missale Romanum*.<sup>102</sup> In this context, however, Bruylants loosely presents historical evidence in order to convince the cardinal president of the consilium that the verb *despicere* must be eliminated from the missal.

This is not to say that the theme evoked by *despicere* is entirely absent from the missal revised by the consilium of 1970, and subsequently of 1975 and 2002. The notion that the Christian should look beyond the things of the world for the sake of striving toward God and heavenly realities frequently appears in the fathers and doctors of the Church as well as the orations of the revised missals without this key verb. One example, which appears in both forms of the Roman rite, suffices to demonstrate this point.

Deus, qui fidelium mentes unius  
efficis voluntatis: da populis tuis id amare  
quod praecipis, id desiderare quod  
promittis; ut inter mundanas varietates  
ibi nostra fixa sint corda, ubi vera sunt  
gaudia.<sup>103</sup>

O God, who make the minds of the  
faithful to be of one will, grant that  
your people may love that which you  
command, desire that which you promise;  
so that, amidst the vicissitudes of worldly  
things, our hearts may be fixed on that  
place where joys are true.<sup>104</sup>

In MR1962, this is the collect of the fourth Sunday after Easter. In MR1970 and MR2002, the formula is unchanged although its context has shifted to the twenty-first Sunday *per annum*.<sup>105</sup> The point to note here is that the petition that the faithful set their hearts and minds on heavenly realities rather than earthly remains the same, and can be found in various revised orations of the more recent form. This and similar orations have been excluded from this study simply because they do not include the verb *despicere*.

## Conclusion

Phrases such as *despicere mundum et terrena* reflect a plethora of spiritual and liturgical riches that mark the history of Latin Christianity from its origins in the late second century. Eighteen proper orations of the *Missale Romanum* of 1962 utilised the verb *despicere* to contrast the Christian attitude toward the transient things of the world with the attitude toward heavenly realities. Although perhaps difficult to understand at first, the verb *despicere* in such contexts invites the faithful to examination of conscience and progress in the spiritual life. It is a forceful verb that can cause the faithful to pause and reflect on their regard for the passing and inferior goods of the world. Rich in spiritual and theological content, the verb contributes to the Christian formation of those who participate daily in the more ancient form of

<sup>102</sup> Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel*, 2 vols has been cited many times in the course of this study.

<sup>103</sup> Oratio, Dominica IV post pascha, MR 1962, p. 342.

<sup>104</sup> My translation. Cf. ICEL's almost self-contradictory translation: Opening prayer, Monday, fifth week of Easter, *Sacramentary* (1985), p. 244: 'Father, help us to seek the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.'

<sup>105</sup> Collecta, Dominica XXI per annum, MR1970, p. 360; same as MR 2002, p. 471.

the Mass. Moreover, the liturgical use of *despicere* is no mere antiquarian relic from the distant patristic age; it is a living part of the tradition that only grew and expanded in a process of organic development that accelerated in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. In the orations of the Roman missals revised following the Second Vatican Council, the verb entirely disappears with one single exception — the optional memorial of St Denis and companions.

Saint Cyprian of Carthage, writing in the mid second century, provides a powerful illustration of the Christian attitude of mind and heart that characterises holy martyrs and confessors in every age:

the one peaceful and trustworthy tranquility, the one solid and firm and constant security, is this, for a man to withdraw from these eddies of a distracting world, and, anchored on the ground of the harbour of salvation, to lift his eyes from earth to heaven; and having been admitted to the gift of God, and being already very near to his God in mind, he may boast, that whatever in human affairs others esteem lofty and grand, lies altogether beneath his consciousness. He who is actually greater than the world can crave nothing, can desire nothing, from the world. How stable, how free from all shocks is that safeguard; how heavenly the protection in its perennial blessings, — to be loosed from the snares of this entangling world, and to be purged from earthly dregs, and fitted for the light of eternal immortality!<sup>106</sup>

Although Cyprian does not use the word *despicere* in this passage, the phrase *despicere mundum et terrena* encapsulates his vehement exhortation to raise one's mind to heaven and free it from all earthly entanglements.<sup>107</sup> The attitude of despising the things of the world or counting them as naught results in a freedom from enslavement to secular affairs and worldly pleasures that characterises the interior attitude of saints from all times and all states of life. As Cyprian intimates, such an attitude is also a necessary preparation for entrance into the eternal eschatological reality of heaven.

This basic Christian attitude is compromised by the 'invasion of the life of the Church by secularism'.<sup>108</sup> The lay faithful especially struggle, on a daily basis, with temptations to become engrossed in secular affairs and worldly pleasures, and therefore to become increasingly forgetful of heaven. By removing or altering

<sup>106</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad Donatum* 13 (CCSL 3A: 11): 'Quam securos non sinit esse subiectos, tam necesse est non sit et ipse securus: ante ipsos terret potestas sua quos facit esse terribiles: adridet, ut saeuat; blanditur, ut fallat; extollit, ut deprimat. Faenore quodam nocendi quam fuerit amplior summa dignitatis et honorum, tam maior exigitur usura poenarum. Vna igitur placida et fida tranquillitas, una solida et firma securitas, si quis ab his inquietantis saeculi turbinibus extractus salutaris portus statione fundetur: ad caelum oculos tollit a terris et ad domini munus admissus ac deo suo mente iam proximus, quicquid apud ceteros in rebus humanis sublime ac magnum uidetur, intra suam iacere conscientiam gloriatur. Nihil adpetere iam, nihil desiderare de saeculo potest, qui saeculo maior est. Quam stabilis, quam inconcussa tutela est, quam perennibus bonis caeleste praesidium, implicantis mundi laqueis solui, in lucem immortalitatis aeternae de terrena faece purgari'; trans. ANF 5: 279.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. 'Deus: qui corporali ieiunio vitia comprimis, mentem elevas, virtutem largiris' in Praefatio IV de Quadragesima, MR2002, p. 527; same in MR1975, p. 402, MR1970, p. 402, and earlier Roman missals for the ferial days of Quadragesima back to MR1570, p. 324.

<sup>108</sup> Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Trojan Horse in the City of God: The Catholic Crisis Explained* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1967, 1993), p. 13; see also p. 12, where von Hildebrand cites Jn 15:19.



constructions containing the verb *despicere* from the Roman missal, the consilium eliminated one obstacle to the growing secularism of contemporary Catholics. Although study and instruction are necessary in order to understand the full meaning of the verb, it readily evokes the contrast between the kingdom of Christ and the world, between what St Augustine calls ‘the city of God’ and ‘the city of man’. Eighteen orations in the MR1962 perhaps cannot mark a huge part of the experience of many Catholics, and there may be few who notice the virtual disappearance of the verb from MR1970 and subsequent Roman missals. *Despicere* constitutes but one small part of Latin Christianity’s armory against encroaching secularism; but so many other parts have been forgotten as well, including private devotions. The faithful, deprived of this and other aids to the formation of a Christian mind and heart, are left with fewer and fewer defences against the struggles, temptations, and desires for worldly successes and pleasures that are passing and in fact draw them away from participation in eternal, celestial joys.

### Notes on contributor

Associate Professor of Church History at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Dr Van Slyke has published on numerous liturgical topics in journals including *Antiphon*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, and *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, and in reference works such as the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* and the *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*. His research interests include the history and theology of baptismal rites, blessings, and exorcisms, and the interpretation of ancient Christian worship. Dr Van Slyke is a member of the Editorial Board of *Usus Antiquior*. Email: vanslyke@kenrick.edu