The “Odor of Sanctity.” Veneration and Politics in Leonard Lessius’s Cause for Beatification (Seventeenth–Twentieth Centuries)

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Abstract

After his death in 1623, the Flemish Jesuit Leonard Lessius (Lenaert Leys, 1554–1623) became the object of public veneration—never approved by the Roman church—that aimed at promoting his beatification. The cult of this theologian, based on many supposed miraculous healings, increased in the seventeenth century but began to fade thereafter. The cult was revitalized in the nineteenth century, when some Flemish Jesuits began a “relic rush” in order to find Lessius’s remains, with the hope of reopening the process of beatification; the cause was, however, definitively abandoned in the twentieth century. The records relating to Lessius’s cause shed light on the policy of sainthood adopted by the new Society of Jesus and its connection with that of the old Society.

Keywords

Leonard Lessius – cause for beatification – policy of sainthood – relics – miraculous healings – Robert Bellarmine – Congregation of the Index – Holy Office – theological controversies of Leuven – Flemish Jesuits

Introduction

On January 15, 1623, the Flemish Jesuit theologian Leonard Lessius died in Leuven.¹ From that moment on, the Flemish Jesuits led a devotional

1 Carlos Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1890–1932), 4:1726–51; *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús biográfico-temático*, ed. Charles

movement to advocate for Lessius's beatification. Over three centuries, the sequence of events involved not only the general postulation of the Society of Jesus and the superiors general of the order, but also the Holy Office and the Congregation of the Index. The communication between these bodies raised issues collateral to Lessius's beatification—old disagreements and different policies on sainthood—which became interlaced as part of an increasingly downward spiral for advocates of the cause, which unavoidably culminated in the cause's extinguishment in the early twentieth century.²

Lessius (1554–1623) was one of the most significant Jesuits of the old Society and is recognized for his contributions to many fields, including economics and ethics.³ In the 1580s, he was prominent in the theological debates on Holy Writ, grace, predestination, and free will that took place in Leuven between the Jesuits of the college and the academics of the Faculty of Theology of the university, who anticipated the Jansenist position.⁴ Lessius promoted an optimistic theology according to which men—who all had previously received God's grace—could knowingly ratify their salvation or damnation through the use of their free will, by accepting the *auxilium sufficiens* provided by God, which acceptance was not, according to the academics, necessary for salvation.

The quarrel at Leuven concerning the relationship between grace and free will prefigured the discussion between Jesuits and Dominicans in the *Congregatio de auxiliis divinae gratiae* (1598–1607); Lessius's involvement in the dispute played a substantial role in the debates over his cause for beatification.⁵

E. O'Neill and Joaquín M. Domínguez (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 3:2336–37. Leonard Schoofs, *De vita et moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii e Societate Iesu theologi liber. Una cum divinarum perfectionum opusculo* (Bruxelles: Thomas Courtois, 1640); I used the edition printed in Paris in 1644 (apud Mathurinum & Ioannem Henault); Charles Van Sull, *Leonard Lessius de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Leuven: Museum Lessianum, 1930).

2 Eleonora Rai, "Le petit prophète: Leonardo Lessio SJ tra controversie teologiche e santità (1554–1623)" (PhD diss., University of Milan-École pratique des hautes études, 2014), 283–344.

3 Leonard Lessius, *De iustitia et iure caeterisque virtutibus cardinalibus libri IV* (Leuven: ex officina Ioannis Masii, 1605); Lessius, *De gratia efficaci decretis Divinis libertate arbitrii et praescientia conditionata disputatio apologetica* (Antwerp: Ioannem Moretum, 1610).

4 On Jesuit schools and universities see Paul F. Grendler, "Jesuit Schools in Europe. A Historiographical Essay," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 7–25. On the Faculty of Theology of the University of Leuven, see Bruno Boute, *Academic Interests and Catholic Confessionalism. The Louvain Privileges of Nomination to Ecclesiastical Benefices* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

5 Rai, "Le petit prophète," 32–168.

Lessius possessed a multi-faceted personality that recalled Juan Caramuel (1606–82), and his ideas embodied *ante litteram* Alfonso de Liguori's teaching (1696–1787): be strict with yourself, but benevolent toward your neighbor.⁶ The Jesuit's theology has been supported by some, criticized by others: many theologians considered him lax and semi-Pelagian (Blaise Pascal strongly criticized Lessius's theology in his *Provincial Letters*), while, for instance, Francis de Sales (1567–1622) and Alfonso de Liguori applauded his theology of grace.⁷ Lessius remains a very controversial figure whose theological doctrines have been discussed for centuries; his critics accused him of heresy and his supporters venerated him as a saint.⁸

The *Vita* on the Index

On July 7, 1894, Torquato Armellini (1823–1901), the general postulator of the Society of Jesus, addressed a letter to Serafino Vannutelli (1834–1915), prefect of the Congregation of the Index (1893–96);⁹ he requested that the *De vita et moribus R.P. Patri Leonardi Lessii*,¹⁰ the biography of Lessius forbidden by the Index, be examined and reprinted by the Congregation of Rites: a revision to the biography would facilitate re-opening the cause for beatification.¹¹

Although the documents stored in the archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith identify Leonard Schoofs as the author of the *Vita*, its true authorship is uncertain. According to the *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, it should be attributed to the Jesuit Jacob Wyns (Wjns or Wijns, 1593–1649), Lessius's nephew and the first unofficial postulator of Lessius's cause in

6 Julia A. Fleming, *Defending Probabilism. The Theology of Juan Caramuel* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

7 Toon Van Houdt, "Money, Time and Labour. Leonardus Lessius and the Ethics of Lending and Interest Taking," *Ethical Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (1995): 11–27. Francis of Sales to Lessius, August 26, 1618, in *Oeuvres complètes de saint François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève, Lettres* (Paris: Gaume Frères, 1833), 3:532; 413–15.

8 Stefania Tutino speaks about Lessius's "bold irreverence". Stefania Tutino, *Shadows of Doubt. Language and Truth in Post-reformation Catholic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 179.

9 *Diccionario histórico*, 1:232–33.

10 Schoofs, *De vita*.

11 Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede [hereafter ACDF], *Index, Atti e documenti 1886–97*, f. 257^r.

the seventeenth century.¹² Wyns would not have published the manuscript under his own name, as it would have appeared partisan; moreover, he was fearful of worsening his own situation in General Vitelleschi's eyes, as the latter already did not appreciate Lessius's public cult, which had not been approved by the Holy See.¹³

The Bibliothèque Royale of Belgium stores a two-volume manuscript titled *De vita et moribus P. Leonardi Lessii*, attributed to Wyns; certainly, this work is the basis for the published *Vita*.¹⁴ It is likely that Lessius's relatives (the publisher Thomas Courtois was also Lessius's nephew) worked together to promote their uncle's beatification. Indeed, the *Vita* functions as a hagiography, a fact which became the chief concern expressed by the Holy Office and the Index.

In the nineteenth century, an interest in renewing the cause developed in Flanders, where many Jesuits considered Lessius a national saint. The initial impulse to seek Lessius's beatification arose in the seventeenth century, when an informative process on his life and virtues was conducted in the diocese of Malines. However, the documents of this process have been lost. The author of a paper written in 1923 to celebrate the third centenary of Lessius's death claimed to have found the documentation of the informative process in the library of the archbishop's palace in Malines.¹⁵ Nevertheless, three years of searching for the records in Malines (1869–72) proved fruitless, and Armellini was similarly unable to find them in the 1890s.¹⁶

Raffaele Pierotti (1836–1905), a Dominican commissioner of the Holy Office and a cardinal since 1896, was appointed to examine Armellini's request.

- 12 Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque*, 8:1306. Diana Stanciu, "An Aristotelian, an Example of Virtue and/or a Mystic? Learned Conventions Disguising Polemic Goals in the Biography of Leonardus Lessius," *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 88, no. 4 (2012): 369–93; Toon Van Houdt, "Jacob Wijns S.J., *De vita, et moribus R.P. Leonardi Lessii liber* (1640)," in *Jesuit books in the Low Countries, 1540–1773. A selection from the Maurits Sabbe Library*, eds. Paul Begheyn, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 104–6.
- 13 Centre de Documentation et de Recherche: Religion-Culture-Société, Leuven [hereafter KADOC], *Poncelet*, 5, *Quelques extraits*, f. 117.
- 14 Jacob Wyns, *De Vita et moribus patris Leonardi Lessii Societatis Iesu theologi clarissimi duo*, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België [hereafter KBR], MS 4070 (4021); Albert Ampe, "Marginalia lessiana," *Ons geestelijk erf* 29, no. 1 (1955): 5–29.
- 15 Antonio Pérez Goyena, "El tercer centenario de la muerte de un gran teologo," *Razón y fe* 2 (1923): 50–69. The same location is mentioned in Jean-François Foppens, *Bibliotheca belgica sive virorum in Belgio vita, scriptisque illustrium catalogus, librorumque nomenclatura* (Brussels: Petrum Foppens, 1739), 2:815–17, here 817.
- 16 KADOC, *Poncelet*, 5, *Lessiana*, f. 123.

The Dominican expressed his reluctance to remove the book from the Index because of the absence of the clause *donec corrigatur* [until corrected] in the absolute condemnation pronounced by the Congregation of the Index 250 years earlier. Instead, in 1641, the Holy Office had analyzed the biography and delivered a censorship *donec corrigatur*.

After the condemnation decree (December 28, 1646), the Congregation of the Index and the Holy Office dealt with repeated Jesuit requests for its revocation.¹⁷ In March 1649, the text was transmitted to the Congregation of Rites, which had already examined the *Vita* and determined that it was an unauthorized hagiography.

The Index had proposed many corrections to the *Vita* in the seventeenth century, but these were never implemented. According to Pierotti, it would have been improper to reverse the condemnation from the seventeenth century. However, Pierotti eventually decided to agree to Armellini's request, as long as he advised the Congregation of Rites that the book had been condemned.¹⁸

In the 1890s, the commissioners who re-examined the book focused on two main issues, as their seventeenth-century predecessors had done: doctrinal controversies and the attribution of sanctity.¹⁹ The censorship of the *Vita* demonstrates how, in the mid-seventeenth century, the Index and Holy Office were deeply worried about both topics: first, they were concerned about the spread of theological controversies with the explosion of Jansenism; second, those were the years of the Roman reorganization of the procedures of canonization, and the new rules meant that popular veneration toward the dead considered to be saints—without the authorization of the Holy See—needed to be regulated under the authority of the Roman Church.

As regards doctrine, the commissioners underlined the necessity of eliminating the report on the theological controversies of Leuven. They were keen to bury the dispute, since it had undermined the doctrinal unity of Catholicism, and dangerously divided adherents of two specific theological trends, who

17 ACDF, *Index, Atti e documenti 1886–97*, f. 258^r; *Protocolli 1894–96*, f. 92; *Diari IV*, f. 245; *Protocolli 1894*, f. 64^v.

18 ACDF, *Index, Atti e documenti 1886–97*, f. 258^r.

19 ACDF, *Index, Protocolli FF 3, XXVIII*, ff. 1–23; *Index, Atti e Documenti 1886–97*, f. 257. The fact recalls the case of Sirmond and Valerian; see Jean-Louis Quantin, “Philologie et querelle de la grâce au XVII^e siècle: Sirmond, Valérien de Cimiez et le Saint-Office,” in *Amicorum Societatis. Mélanges offerts à François Dolbeau pour son 65^e anniversaire*, eds. Jacques Elfassi, Cécil Lanéry, and Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk (Florence: Sismel edizioni del Galluzzo, 2013), 699–739, here 720.

charged each other with heresy. Lessius, who expounded an optimistic doctrine of grace, which highlighted the substantial importance of men's response to God's invitation, was attacked as being a semi-Pelagian. In contrast, the academics of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leuven, influenced by the teaching of Michael Bay (1513–89), set forth a rigid Augustinism that Lessius considered very close to Calvinism. The re-examination of the biography in the nineteenth century focused on the papal edict of July 10, 1588 that imposed silence on the disputants; the commissioners concluded that it would not have been appropriate to publicize the partial viewpoint of Lessius's supporters.²⁰

As for the attribution of sanctity, the commissioners determined that two points needed to be omitted from the book: Urban VIII's approval of Lessius's life and virtues, as claimed by the author; and the record of the miraculous healings attributed to the Jesuit *post mortem*.²¹ Also, the depositions concerning exorcisms conducted by Lessius or through Lessius's intercession could not be described in detail.

On November 8, 1894, another Dominican, Enrico Buonpensiere (1853–1929), sent his *votum* [evaluation] to the Index's secretary, Marcolino Cicognani (secretary 1894–99).²² His first point was the inappropriateness of anticipating the church's judgment in the matter of sanctity. Buonpensiere stressed that Lessius was counted among the servants of God; thus, only private veneration could be allowed.²³

Buonpensiere also drew attention to the danger of reviving the theological controversies of Leuven, especially considering what he referred to as Schoofs's "historical inaccuracies." Buonpensiere stated that in order to preserve harmony between the religious orders, Schoofs's mistakes should have been omitted, as they might have awakened the curiosity of archivists and rekindled the

20 *Controversia inter doctores Lovanienses et patres Societatis Jesu tempore Xyxti v, Papal edict*, ACDF, St. St. E 7–c, f. 129. Archivum romanum Societatis Iesu [hereafter ARS1], *Fl. Belg.* 70–I, f. 245^r; Eleonora Rai, "Between Augustine and Pelagius: Leonard Lessius in the Leuven Controversies, from 1587 to the 20th century," *The Journal of Baroque Studies*, forthcoming.

21 Urban VIII (1568–1644), was elected pope in 1623.

22 ACDF, *Index, Protocolli* 1894–96, ff. 65^r–66^v.

23 *R.P. Leonardus Lessius in Catalogus Sanctorum Beatorum Venerabilium et Servorum Dei e Societate Jesu cum Statu Causarum Beatificationis et Canonizationis eorumdem ineunte saeculo vigesimo curavit C.B. Soc. Jesu*, (Rome: Tipografia Cooperativa Sociale, 1901), no. 104, 42–43. *Status causarum servorum Dei e soc. iesu ab anno 1915 ab annum 1938 additis elencho sanctorum et beatorum Soc. Iesu et indice omnium venerabilium ac servorum Dei, Congregatio Generali, XXVIII* (Isola del Liri: Macioce & Piasani, 1938), no. 48, 26–27.

deplorable debates that split Catholicism in early modern Europe.²⁴ However, contrary to Buonpensiere's *votum*, such "historical inaccuracies" did not exist. Buonpensiere suggested eliminating the reference to Sixtus v's approval of Lessius's doctrine on the grounds that many historians denied that it had been given.²⁵ The papal edict of Sixtus v was, however, very clear: Lessius's doctrine had been defined as orthodox [*sanae doctrinae articuli*]. Buonpensiere was probably influenced by historiography adverse to the Society of Jesus and did not read the edict critically and impartially.²⁶

The most significant aspect of Buonpensiere's evaluation emerged from an unofficial document. In a secret memorandum addressed to Cicognani, he stated that Armellini's request to reprint the *Vita* was a very complicated problem, and "for us, the Dominicans, it could be compromising."²⁷ Buonpensiere was making the point that the issue could not be solved solely by amending the book; it was a more problematic question involving two religious orders in the early modern age, the Society of Jesus and the Order of Preachers. Employing the old idea of the Society as a wellspring of conspiracy, the Dominican saw the shadow of a Jesuit plot which he believed might jeopardize his own order.

Buonpensiere recalled Lessius's doctrine of grace and Holy Writ and strongly criticized his inspiration theory. He claimed (incorrectly, as Vincent Gasser's intervention during the third session of the First Vatican Council showed) that this theory had been condemned during the First Vatican Council, along with the doctrine of Daniel Haneberg (1816–76), who had been influenced by Lessius's teachings.²⁸ Buonpensiere also noted that Lessius's inspiration theory had been condemned in the pope's encyclical letter on Holy Writ. The Dominican was surely referring to Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (November 18, 1893), in which the pope, while not explicitly condemning Lessius's doctrine, stated that the true author of Holy Writ was the Holy Spirit.²⁹ As a result, Lessius's doctrine opposing the verbal dictation theory was seriously undermined.

24 ACDF, *Index, Protocolli* 1894–96, f. 65^v.

25 ACDF, *Index, Protocolli* 1894–96, f. 66^r. Sixtus v (1521–90), was elected pope in 1585.

26 Especially Jaques H. Serry, *Historiae congregationum de auxiliis divinae gratiae sub summis pontificibus Clemente VIII. Et Paulo v* (Anvers: Sumptibus Societati, 1709).

27 ACDF, *Index, Protocolli* 1894–96, f. 93^r.

28 Vincent Gasser (1809–79; Archbishop of Brixen), *Relatio de emendationibus capituli secundae constitutionis dogmaticae de fide catholica, acta et decreta Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani, acta ante sessionem III* (Freiburg: Herder, 1890), 7:139–41. See also Henri Holstein, "Lessius a-t-il été condamné au Concile du Vatican?," *Recherches de science religieuse* 49, no. 2 (1961): 219–26.

29 Leo XIII (1810–1903), was elected pope in 1878.

Ultimately, Buonpensiere recommended that censorship of the *Vita* continue. Buonpensiere argued that the book surreptitiously promoted Lessius's doctrinal mistakes and that the promotion of his cause for beatification represented an official attempt to validate those (and the Society's) doctrines.

Buonpensiere reached misleading conclusions. Lessius's doctrine certainly did not represent the views of the entirety of the Society, and in fact had already been condemned by many Jesuits in the seventeenth century. Cardinal Bellarmine (1542–1621) and Generals Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615) and Mutio Vitelleschi (1563–1645) strongly opposed Lessius's *De gratia efficaci* as a work that expounded a doctrine more radical than Luis de Molina's (1535–1600).³⁰

Buonpensiere held the longstanding but incorrect view that the Society behaves as a monolithic block; on the contrary, despite generally probabilistic tendencies, doctrinal divergences within the Society had become so important in the early modern period that Acquaviva promulgated a decree on grace in 1610 to restore doctrinal unity within the order (a goal that had been pursued since Ignatius's time).³¹ It appears that Buonpensiere acted out of old notions of party politics, based on the mistrust that had divided Dominicans and Jesuits over the *controversia de auxiliis* for centuries.

In November 1894, Cicognani agreed to reprint the *Vita*, subject to the condition that Buonpensiere's corrections be applied.³² It would have remained on the list of forbidden books if Armellini had not revived the issue at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Evolution of Lessius's Cause

Up to the early twentieth century Lessius's cause had many sponsors, especially in Belgium. However, the campaign to reopen Lessius's cause for beatification slowed to a halt in 1905 due to a definite political choice made by the general of the Society.

Although the procedure for re-establishing the process had begun in the 1890s, it progressed slowly, as shown by the correspondence between Armellini and Charles van Sull, at that time a less-than-enthusiastic vice-postulator of

30 Acquaviva to Franciscus Florentinus, August 21, 1610 in ARSI, *Fl. Belg.*, 1-II, ff. 1169–70.

31 Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, "Le décret d'Aquaviva sur la grace efficace," *Recherches de science religieuse* 14, no. 1 (1924): 46–60, here 48.

32 ACDF, Index, *Atti e Documenti* 1886–97, f. 259^r.

Lessius's cause.³³ In March 1901, the new general postulator, Camillo Beccari (postulator 1901–23), was informed by Andreas Cardinal Steinhuber (1824–1907), a Jesuit and the prefect of the Congregation of the Index from October 1896 to September 1907, that the biography was no longer forbidden. Beccari then communicated to van Sull his intention to compose the articles for the process.³⁴

Nevertheless, other unexpected obstacles arose. First, the Flemish provincial suggested waiting until after Father Alfred Wouthers finished a new biography of Lessius (based on Wyns's two-volume manuscript, discovered in the Royal Archives of Brussels). Second, in a letter to Beccari, van Sull emphasized that the theologians at the University of Leuven would not appreciate Lessius's beatification, since the Jesuit had condemned their predecessors as heretics, and many Flemish Jesuits still recalled Lessius as the opponent of the alleged heresy promoted by the faculty centuries before.³⁵ Once again, the theological controversies had come back to weaken Lessius's cause. Finally, the absence of witnesses for the process and the unreliability of Schoofs's hagiography presented obstacles. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lessius's cult, still strong in the nineteenth century, was disappearing, even in Flanders.

Several Jesuits were persuaded that a process in favor of Lessius was premature. Before it could proceed, it was necessary to exonerate him from some accusations, first of all that of disobedience towards the general after the publication of his treatise *De gratia efficaci*.³⁶

A long silence followed. Between 1904–1905, Wouthers was authorized to conduct research for the new biography in the Jesuit archives. However, General Luis Martin (1892–1906) imposed a condition: if disagreements between Lessius and Bellarmine were discovered, Lessius's process should be dropped. As van Sull wrote, Wouthers told him about some letters which clearly showed disputes between the two Jesuit theologians.³⁷

The reason for the general's decision was strategic, and coincided with a precise policy of sainthood promoted by the Society, which at the beginning of the twentieth century focused on one person—Robert Bellarmine. His

33 Archive of the General Postulation for the causes of saints of the Society of Jesus, [hereafter APSJ], *Postulation's diary*, 1891–1904, *Leonardo Lessio*, August 1900; February 1899.

34 APSJ, *Postulation's diary*, April 28, 1901.

35 Van Sull to Beccari in APSJ, 2, *Corrispondenza* 1898–1900.

36 Van Sull to Beccari, April 24, 1901 in APSJ, 3, *Corrispondenza* 1901.

37 Van Sull to Beccari, January 21, 1905 in APSJ, 6, *Corrispondenza* 1904–1905.

beatification cause began soon after his death, but was interrupted several times; it culminated in his beatification in 1923 and canonization in 1931.³⁸

In the first years of the twentieth century, interest in Cardinal Bellarmine's cause was very high due to his prestige and authority. He had been an extremely significant figure in the Counter-Reformation and Catholic renewal in the early modern period; as a theologian at the Holy See, he had composed crucial polemical works, and he inherited his moral zeal for the spiritual reform of the church from his uncle, Pope Marcellus II (r. April–May 1555).

Moreover, although Lessius was one of the most significant Jesuits in the early modern period for his innovations in moral theology and his role in disputes over grace and free will, his reputation did not equal Bellarmine's in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or among historians who have studied the Society of Jesus. Lessius's most important works, *De iustitia et iure* and *De gratia efficaci*, have earned strong criticism, even within the Society. Lessius's reputation for sanctity was vaguely diffused in the order, but not many Jesuits were aware of his life story, and devotion to him, which, reached its peak in the mid-seventeenth century, had declined.

Bellarmino's beatification had the potential for a wider resonance. In May 1901, Cardinal Aloisi Masella (1826–1902)—prefect of the Congregation of Rites (1899–1902)—confided to the general postulator of the Society that the reason for the recent suspension of Bellarmine's cause in the 1890s was the publication of a pamphlet attacking the pope's temporal power, in which the author untruthfully attributed that position to Bellarmine.³⁹ Eventually and after many delays, the cardinal's cause ended successfully.

The disagreements between Lessius and his old master on the subjects of grace and free will emerged from letters exchanged in the first years of the seventeenth century.⁴⁰ At first, Bellarmine had supported Lessius's theological positions against the accusations of heresy that had been leveled against him by the theologians at the University of Leuven. Bellarmine also provided a

38 Stefania Tutino, *Empire of souls: Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) and the Christian Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Franco Motta, *Bellarmino. Una teologia politica della Controriforma* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

39 Gaetano Aloisi Masella, cardinal in 1887, Prefect of the Congregation of Rites from 1899 to 1902. APSJ, *Postulation's diary*, May 1901; Giuseppe Toscanelli, *Religione e patria osteggiate dal Papa: l'Italia si deve difendere* (Florence: Bocca, 1890).

40 Bellarmine to Lessius, December 31, 1610, in Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum, Supplément aux oeuvres du Cardinal Bellarmine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1913), 145–47; Lessius to Bellarmine, February 18, 1611 in Le Bachelet, *Auctarium*, 148–50. See also Archivio Storico della Pontificia Università Gregoriana [hereafter APUG], 540, ff. 73^r–74^v.

censure against what he saw as the dangers of the academics' assertions.⁴¹ Their theological views were, according to Bellarmine, much too close to Calvin's and Melancthon's doctrines—especially during that “difficult time” of the Protestant schisms. In particular, Bellarmine condemned the assertions made by these individuals that seemed to nullify the notion of free will and that accordingly stood in opposition to the formulations on this matter established by the Council of Trent. Bellarmine had also sought to highlight that these doctrines could be derived from those of Michael Bay, and wondered whether Bay's heresy had been reintroduced into the university.

However, after the *Congregatio de auxiliis* and the publication of *De gratia efficaci*, Bellarmine declared that he had misunderstood Lessius's theology twenty-five years earlier, and changed his position, now strongly opposing his theology as heretical. The dispute between them focused on an essential matter, especially at a time when the church greatly feared the consequences of theological divisions. Lessius and Bellarmine were in agreement in rejecting physical predetermination, but not about the relationship between grace and good works, predestination, and election to glory. The cardinal believed that doctrines such as Lessius's and Molina's represented serious dangers for Catholic theology and for the reputation of the Society. During the *Congregatio de auxiliis*, the anti-Protestant function of Molina's doctrine had been praised but, at the end of the congregation, Bellarmine chose caution, embracing the general's policy.⁴² In 1610, the divergence between Bellarmine's and Lessius's opinions was extremely clear—unlike twenty-five years earlier. The cardinal began to think that Lessius could be indeed charged with semi-Pelagianism.

One specific point, among others, troubled the cardinal. From the *De gratia efficaci*, he understood that Lessius viewed predestination as descending merely from the prevision of merits, in order to preserve man's freedom; according to Bellarmine, the notion of the prevision of merits was to be seen as a manifestation of prescience, rather than predestination. That theory was extremely close to Catarinus's and opposed to the doctrines of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, and therefore unacceptable to Bellarmine. At the time of the Leuven controversies, Bellarmine interpreted Lessius's doctrine to mean that, although predestination to glory derived from foreseen merits, predestination to effective grace depended only on God's will.

41 *Controversia inter doctores Lovanienses*, ff. 34^r-35^r; “Propositions extraites de l'enseignement oral de Jacques Janson et envoyées à Rome par Lessius,” in Le Bachelet, *Bellarmin*, 158–60.

42 *De novis controversiis inter Patres quosdam ex Ordine Praedicatorum et patrem Molinam Jesuitam* (a) *Opusculum auctore Roberto Cardinale Bellarmino*, ACDF, S.O. 15 e, n. 146.

Lessius's letters show his disappointment and displeasure over his former master's change of mind.⁴³ Having verified the existence of disputes between the two theologians and following the general's instruction, the Society finally chose Bellarmine and sacrificed Lessius's cause. Three hundred years after the quarrel with Bellarmine on the treatise *De gratia efficaci*, Lessius was defeated again *post mortem* in the "sainthood race." He had tried to embody sanctity by living an ascetic life, and had gathered many supporters, but that turned out to be insufficient in the context of the strategies of the new Society, even in a period in which many causes interrupted in the early modern period had bloomed again. The definitive interruption of Lessius's cause at the beginning of the twentieth century is evidenced by the list of the processes in progress sent by Beccari to the general.⁴⁴ However, Lessius's supporters did not lose hope. Indeed, in 1907, the correspondence between van Sull and the general postulation reopened. Beccari communicated his intention to search for the records of the informative process in the archives of the Congregation of Rites.⁴⁵ A few days later, he wrote to van Sull that his investigation had not borne fruit; he knew that the process had never arrived to the congregation, and that in the seventeenth century the biography had been forbidden by the Index. He suspected that the Leuven academics had opposed the dissemination of the book because of its description of the controversies.⁴⁶

In 1909, van Sull—who became increasingly devoted to Lessius over time—communicated to the postulation "good news": after nineteen years, Wouters had renounced his intention to compose Lessius's biography. The provincial was looking for somebody who would take the assignment, and van Sull himself accepted it.

The most recent development concerning Lessius's cause dates back to the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁷ The new general postulator Carlo Miccinelli (postulator 1928–1952) remembered his meeting with van Sull in 1946, when they discussed Lessius's cause; on that occasion, van Sull had shown Miccinelli some of Lessius's relics that he stored in his room. Miccinelli subsequently investigated Lessius, and discovered that his cause for beatification had not made any progress in three centuries. A historical study that could prove Lessius's sanctity was the only feasible path to continue his cause. However, despite this new

43 Lessius to Bellarmine, 18 February 1611 in Le Bachelet, *Auctarium*, 148–50; see APUG 540, ff. 73^r–74^v. Lessius to Bellarmine, December 31, 1610 (Le Bachelet, *Auctarium*, 145–47).

44 APSJ, Beccari to Wernz, September 1906 (loose sheet).

45 APSJ, Beccari to van Sull, May 4, 1907 (loose sheet).

46 APSJ, Beccari to van Sull, May 9, 1907 (loose sheet).

47 APSJ, Miccinelli to van Sull, end of the 1940s–beginning of the 1950s.

interest in Lessius's cause, no progress was achieved in the twentieth century. Lessius's sanctity could not be verified through new and current testimonies that certified to an enduring veneration, strengthened by concrete signs, such as miracles attributed to his intercession. On the contrary, the cause for Lessius's sainthood was desired and promoted by only a small circle of men.

Two elements characterized Lessius's cause between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries: first, the long series of evaluations of Schoofs's *Vita*; and second, Bellarmine's cause for beatification, which had favorable features that Lessius's cause did not. Furthermore, the theological disputes that had first divided Lessius and the academics of Leuven, and then Jesuits and Dominicans in the Congregatio de auxiliis, were still being discussed three centuries later. Buonpensiere and van Sull kept the memory of the controversies alive: the Dominican with his private memorandum addressed to Cicognani; the Jesuit by referring to the academics' opposition to Lessius's cause in a letter to the general postulation.⁴⁸ Lessius's sanctity was disputed by many, whose number and authority exceeded that of his devotees.

Veneration and Miracles

The necessary element at the foundation of a cause for beatification is veneration of the deceased, who is considered by the devotees who pray to him capable of miraculously interceding on their behalf. This faith represents the substratum for commencing a cause: without veneration, sanctity (meaning sanctity as validated by the church, according to its law) does not exist. In the first half of the seventeenth century, just before the beginning of Lessius's informative process, Urban VIII reorganized the norm relating to this matter; the veneration accorded to Lessius seemed to violate this papal regulation.

The *Vita* describes the circumstances of Lessius's pious death, after having suffered from a debilitating illness for forty years.⁴⁹ Lessius became ill during his escape from Douai—then under attack from Protestants—when he was a boy.⁵⁰ He suffered for his entire life from terrible aches in his legs and abdomen.⁵¹ His reputation for humility and wisdom attracted Flemish people, and after his death his relics became objects of veneration. Hair, nails, and pieces of

48 ACDF, *Index, Protocolli* 1894–96, f. 93^r.

49 Schoofs, *De vita*, 177.

50 On wars of religion in the Netherlands see Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520–1635* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

51 Schoofs, *De vita*, 166.

flesh were taken from Lessius's corpse and soon were believed to have thaumaturgic powers.⁵² In the early modern period, the model for sanctity was based on three main elements: veneration accorded to the dead when he or she was alive, heroic virtues, and miracles.⁵³ A person's death played a substantial role in the verification of sanctity. It was believed that at the moment of death, the charismatic power migrated from the dead body to the relics, which became thaumaturgic.

Until the mid-seventeenth century, Lessius's tomb attracted pilgrims; according to the sources, many miraculous healings took place there. The thaumaturgic power of Lessius's relics was hailed in the statements of many devotees, who believed they had been miraculously cured of their illnesses or pains.⁵⁴ The fame of Lessius's relics grew. The doorman of the Jesuit college in Leuven began to supply people with holy water in which Lessius's relics had been immersed. As has been pointed out, the Jesuits played an important role in popularizing the use of holy water sanctified by contact with the relics of a saint.⁵⁵ In the early modern period, this was a common procedure because reaching and touching relics directly was rarely easy; therefore, water, oil, and flowers that came in contact with miraculous images or a saint's remains were used to provide indirect connections to the saint when asking for a grace.

Most cases of mysterious healings and exorcisms associated with Lessius occurred around 1640. Testimonies presented cases of people possessed by evil spirits or affected by *maleficia* [spells] who were healed through Lessius's intercession. In July 1640, for instance, a girl who had been paralyzed for three years was healed by the laying of a relic on her abdomen.⁵⁶ The description of the cure in this and other cases has the supernatural features of an exorcism. Also in 1640, Maria van der Zupe and her house had been affected by an enchantment; the spell "domum nocturne terroribus et spectris infestabat" [haunted her house with terror and spirits during the night].⁵⁷ A novena addressed to Lessius's relics was sufficient to heal the woman and to free the house from ghosts.

52 Lessius's Jesuit brothers amputated his thumbs and index fingers of both hands (used for the elevation of the host, during mass). ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 256; KADOC, *Poncelet*, 5, 91, *Mirabilia*, ff. 91–102.

53 Giulio Sodano, *Modelli e selezione del santo moderno. Periferia napoletana e centro romano* (Naples: Liguori, 2002), 167–93.

54 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 257.

55 Sodano, *Il miracolo*, 81.

56 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 268.

57 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 270.

Three years earlier, a woman named Gertrud Berden had been struck down by an illness identified as originating from an evil spell, and some Capuchin friars had performed an unsuccessful exorcism. The source describes the demonic origin of the sickness and the effects of the first exorcism in fantastic terms (aquatic monsters apparently emerged from the body of the woman). She was finally cured through contact with Lessius's head, which was kept in Leuven.⁵⁸ The connection between physical healing and release from demons was rooted in the Gospels, where Jesus was presented as a healer and an exorcist. The report on these extraordinary healings referred to "divus" [divine] Lessius as the new patron saint of Belgium, sent by God to help Flemish people against illnesses and spells.⁵⁹ The demonic possession was considered equivalent to a real illness.⁶⁰ The symptoms of some people supposed to be possessed are reminiscent of epileptic seizures, as in Joanna Goffin's case (1639): she was affected for seventeen years by a spell which caused spasms, and her bowels were haunted by evil spirits. The woman was completely healed after completing a novena (a recurring element) in front of Lessius's reliquary.⁶¹

A medical report signed by Ioannes Haestens, a surgeon in Leuven, dated June 3, 1640, labeled Henry Fox's healing as a miracle (it is important to highlight that this is the report of a physician with an expertise limited by his epoch). Fox suffered a long and varied series of symptoms, not ascribable to a specific illness, as often happened in the healings attributed to Lessius's intercession. Nevertheless, sometimes we can hypothesize about the origin of the illness, as in the healing of a nun in 1640; her symptoms—difficulty in breathing and chest pain—were probably related to cardiac pathologies.⁶² She was healed by drinking three spoons of water that had been blessed with Lessius's relics.

Some people who claimed to have been healed did not obtain an immediate cure; they recovered after a long process, characterized by relapses, and after several contacts with Lessius's relics and tomb. The Roman Church's conception of what constitutes a miracle has changed over the centuries and has been subjected to juridical regularization. The typology of cure described in these

58 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 271.

59 KADOC, *Poncelet*, 5, 103, *Relatio sanitatis*, f. 103.

60 Paola Vismara, "Ciel et enfer d'après les recits de miracles," in *Le jugement, le Ciel et l'enfer dans l'histoire du christianisme. Actes de la douzième rencontre d'histoire religieuse tenue à Fontevraud les 14 et 15 octobre 1988* (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1989), 121–32, here 121.

61 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 259.

62 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 70-I, f. 264.

archival sources is often incompatible with the current conceptual model of instant, unexplainable, and definitive healing; however, it does correspond to exorcism, meaning not a single ritual but a series of sessions necessary to dispel demons.

Beginning in the 1640s, Lessius's devotees began to make bequests to express their gratitude and veneration. For instance, the miraculously healed Elizabeth Isenbacht donated money to build a chapel dedicated to Lessius; moreover, she offered a five-hundred-florin gold crown for Lessius's head, which was removed from his body, crowned, and preserved in a reliquary.⁶³

The growing veneration of Lessius's tomb and the encouragement provided by the Flemish Jesuits distressed General Muzio Vitelleschi. He realized that Lessius's cult had grown uncontrollably through the dissemination of stories about miraculous healings, even though the Holy See had not acknowledged their validity. He admonished Jacob Wyns and ordered him not to promote the cult, pointing out that it contravened the decree promulgated in 1625.⁶⁴ Vitelleschi referred to Urban VIII's juridical reorganization, and especially to the decree established by the Holy Office on March 13, 1625, that forbade any cult, public or private, of a dead person with a reputation for sanctity without authorization from the Holy See.⁶⁵

However, Lessius's name had been inserted in the litany of the saints in Leuven, and devotees were being allowed to light candles on his tomb.⁶⁶ Vitelleschi was astonished that the superiors of the province had not forbidden such open veneration as it clearly contravened the Roman regulations.

63 ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 61, *Historia Collegii Lovaniensis anni 1667*, ff. 124^r–27^v; Charles van Lully, "Discovery of the Remains of the Ven. Father Lessius. Communicated by Father Lallemand," *Letters and notices* 21 (1891–92): 494–501; KADOC, Poncelet, 5, 81, *De inventione ossium S.D. Leonardi Lessii in crypta Ecclesiae S.i Michaelis brevis dissertatio*, KADOC, Poncelet, 5, 81, ff. 81–90.

64 Vitelleschi to Wyns, January 16, 1644, in KADOC, Poncelet, 5, 117, *Quelques extraits*, ff. 119–20. A decree dated October 2, 1625 allowed to collect images of the charismatic dead "in secreto" [in private].

65 Miguel Gotor, *I beati del papa. Santità, Inquisizione e obbedienza in età moderna* (Florence: Olschki, 2002), 285–94. See also Gotor, "La riforma dei processi di canonizzazione dalle carte del Sant'Ufficio (1588–1642)," in *L'Inquisizione e gli storici: un cantiere aperto. Tavola rotonda nell'ambito della conferenza annuale della ricerca* (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 2000), 279–88; Fabijan Veraja, *La beatificazione. Storia problemi prospettive* (Rome: Congregazione per le cause dei santi, 1983), 69–79. On canonization in the early modern age see Pierluigi Giovannucci, *Canonizzazioni e infallibilità pontificia in età moderna* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2008).

66 KADOC, Poncelet, 5, 117, *Quelques extraits*, f. 120.

In the first centuries of Christianity, popular veneration created saints; by the seventeenth century, the situation had radically changed. Wyns's inappropriate zeal undoubtedly damaged Lessius's cause. The general's orders were clear: the Holy Office's decree had to be respected and the veneration of Lessius's relics controlled. In 1644, the general forbade every act of veneration of Lessius and ordered that the distribution of water blessed with his relics be stopped.

The documentation suggests that Vitelleschi was not a supporter of Lessius's cause; as mentioned before, he had been one of the strongest critics of Lessius's doctrine of grace.⁶⁷ Furthermore, as Vitelleschi himself suggested, the impatience shown by Lessius's Jesuit devotees probably worsened the situation. The supposed miracles occurred during the same years in which the informative process was conducted. The testimonies to the miraculous healings attributed to Lessius's intercession provided excellent material for the process; moreover, Lessius's supporters probably encouraged the practice of praying to him by spreading the stories about his intercessory powers. At this stage, it is impossible to say whether Lessius's Jesuit devotees promoted the power of his relics in order to foster the beatification process, or if the pilgrimages to Lessius's tomb were completely genuine, or some of both.

There were three constituent elements of the reported cures: the invocation of Lessius; contact with his relics, often through water; and prayer at his tomb. Some historians support the idea of a decline of the cult of relics in the early modern age, as compared with the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ However, the records related to Lessius—in which we can also read about the veneration of the relics of Saints Francis Xavier (1506–52) and Jan Berchmans (1599–1621)—provide evidence that veneration of relics remained strong during the early modern period. The church's regularization of the practice in the early modern period was an attempt to curb superstition.⁶⁹

After languishing for many years, interest in the cause for Lessius's beatification was revived in the mid-nineteenth century with a significant element of continuity—a quest for Lessius's relics. Unfortunately, the location of Lessius's

67 Kadoc, Poncelet, 5, 117, *Quelques extraits*, f. 121.

68 See, for example, Pierre-André Sigal, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale (XI^e–XIII^e siècle)* (Paris: Cerf, 1985); Maurizio Sangalli, *Miracoli a Milano. I processi informativi per eventi miracolosi nel milanese in età spagnola* (Milan: Ned, 1993).

69 Dominique Julia, "L'Église post-tridentine et les reliques. Tradition, controverse et critique (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle)," in *Reliques modernes. Cultes et usages chrétiens des corps saints des Réformes aux révolutions*, eds. Philippe Boutry, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Dominique Julia, (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2009), 1:69–120.

tomb was unknown in the mid-nineteenth century and his mortal remains had disappeared.

The Quest for Lessius's Tomb (1600s–1800s)

The quest for Lessius's tomb and relics was part of the renewed interest in his cause for beatification. A manuscript composed by the Jesuit Alphons Lallemand (1847–1917), stored in the Centre de Documentation et de Recherche in Leuven, discusses the discovery of Lessius's remains.⁷⁰

In 1623, Lessius was buried in the church of the Jesuit college in Leuven. On November 9, 1640, his remains were moved to a better location in the same church in order to allow for improved access for devotees. According to documentation dated December 15, 1641—discovered in 1890 in the Bollandist Library—the brain was found to be perfectly preserved; it was removed, put in a glass urn, and kept in Leuven—along with his thumb and index—apart from his other relics. On May 2, 1642, Lessius's remains were moved again and put in a decorated urn, as we will see.

In 1868, Jean-Baptiste van Derker, then-postulator for Lessius's cause, searched for his remains in the crypt of Saint Michael's Church (Sint-Michielskerk) at the invitation of the dean of the college of Leuven, who sought to reopen the process.⁷¹ Van Derker concluded that there was no trace of Lessius. Van Derker was not aware of the seventeenth-century records relating to the relocation of the body (discovered in 1890) and thus he had no information enabling him to locate it definitively. The Jesuit found bones and particularly ribs linked by a silver strand. Van Derker attributed the relics, among which he found the seal of Humberto de Principiano (1627–1711, archbishop of Malines in 1689), to an unknown saint, and turned them over to a sacristan. Van Derker did not know he had been in possession of several of Lessius's relics. He later chanced upon a report concerning the preservation of Lessius's body and its relocation in 1642.⁷² Lessius's remains had been set in an adorned reliquary that included a small window through which devotees

70 Albert Lallemand, "Découverte des restes du Vén. Père Lessius. Relation du R.P. Lallemand, extraite des Letters and Notices et augmentée de quelques détails recente," *Lettres de Jersey, Prov. de France* 12, no. 12 (1893): 82–87; KADOC, Poncelet, 5, *De inventione*, ff. 81–90. See also Van Lully, *Discovery*.

71 KADOC, Poncelet, 5, *De inventione*, f. 82; see also Van Derker to Armellini, February 9, 1891 in APSJ, 1, *Corrispondenza* 1885–98.

72 KADOC, Poncelet, 5, *De inventione*, f. 81.

could see the relics. Some portions of the body had already been sent to Jesuit houses; the brain, the bladder stones, a thumb, and an index finger were kept in Leuven.

In 1650, the Jesuits demolished the church in which Lessius had been entombed to build St. Michael Church, and removed Lessius's remains to a temporary chapel, with an unmistakable tag indicating the identity of the bones. The documentation does not reveal when exactly Lessius's remains were moved to St. Michael Church. As mentioned earlier, in the second half of the 1660s, Lessius's head was detached so that it could be crowned (information that would have been useful for van Derker). In 1868, after van Derker unknowingly delivered a package containing Lessius's relics to an unknown sacristan, a change in the church's administration occurred and no documentation or trace of the relics survived. A second exploration of the crypt in 1872 was unsuccessful.

The crucial moment transpired in 1890, when the document describing the 1642 transfer of Lessius's remains was discovered at the Bollandist library.⁷³ The document described the detail of the ribs linked by silver. Van Derker then understood that he had discovered Lessius's remains years before. In 1891, Charles van Sull conducted new research in the crypt at St. Michael. There, van Sull found the remains of the decorated wooden urn described in the record from 1642, in which Lessius's bones had been placed. Further confirmation that they were Lessius's relics was provided by the fact that the head and the ribs were missing; the head had been removed in the seventeenth century, while the ribs had been given to the sacristan by van Derker. Arthur van Gebruchten, professor of osteology at the University of Leuven, examined the bones and provided a description that matched the 1642 documentation. Lessius's remains were authenticated in 1896.

After van Sull's discovery, the bones were buried in a marble grave in the Jesuit church in Leuven. In 2007, his remains were transferred back to St. Michael Church. The quest for the relics demonstrated the veneration that some Flemish Jesuits still felt for their confrère. An article by the Jesuit Theophil De Beurme, published in *Woodstock Letters* in 1891, describes the enthusiasm for the resumption of Lessius's cause.⁷⁴ It was a forlorn hope, yet it had been shared by many Jesuits over three centuries.

73 Copy of the document in Van Sull, *Léonard Lessius*, not numbered page between 320 and 321.

74 Theophilus De Beurme, "Father Leonard Lessius. Resumption of the cause of his beatification," *Woodstock Letters* 20, no.2 (1891): 237–40.

Conclusion

Three main elements need to be highlighted to understand completely the progression of Lessius's cause for beatification.

The first is Lessius's personal struggle for sanctity. The Jesuit strove to reach sanctity through a continuing effort to lead an ascetic and virtuous life. Lessius, who embodied an optimistic view of Christian humanism and was tolerant and open-minded towards his penitents and their moral distress, was nevertheless obsessed by the idea of sin and the certainty of his being a sinner. He flagellated himself daily, fasted continuously, refused every comfort, and spent many hours each day and night praying and meditating on the Bible. According to the sources, he was granted ecstasies.⁷⁵ This attitude attracted many followers and created a devotional atmosphere that became more fervent in the immediate years after Lessius's death. The miracles attributed to his intercession contributed to strengthening this veneration.

A second key element is the attribution of sanctity. For the early modern Flemish Jesuits, who intensely and actively venerated their confrère as a saint, Lessius's beatification and possible canonization would have provided endorsement for the order in their province; moreover, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the idea of creating a national saint contributed to the desire of some to undertake further research on Lessius's life and presumed sanctity.

The third important aspect is the policy on sainthood. Lessius's cause occurred in the context of strategies promoted by the old and new Society of Jesus. The pre-eminent role of Bellarmine's cause in the policy of pursuing recognitions of sainthood within the new Society eventually induced the general to drop Lessius's cause; also, the cause was not fully pursued by the order because it might have created problems arising from the Flemish theologian's positions on grace and free will.

The records related to Lessius's cause and life clearly show us the persistence of tension among theological trends and religious orders, even into the twentieth century; they display how strategic choices can be grounds for decisions concerning causes for canonization; and finally, they shed light on the wide range of theological positions that characterized the old Society of Jesus, within which Lessius's moral probabilism and open-mindedness towards man's freedom—in the soteriological process and also in daily life—were strongly criticized, eventually resulting in the abandonment of his cause.

75 Schoofs, *De vita*, ff. 69–75.

The events connected to Lessius's cause stress the blurring of boundaries between the concepts of heresy and sanctity within Catholicism, particularly during the seventeenth century. Lessius's devotees did not succeed in confirming their assumptions of his sanctity, as several Catholic theologians considered him too daring or even heretical. Although Lessius has never been investigated as a heretic by the Holy Office, the absence of a strong devotional movement will probably never allow him to be beatified, not even after the success of Bellarmine's cause.