

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/166030/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Machielsen, Jan 2023. Sanctity and the refashioning of early modern Catholicism: Saints and their causes between Rome and locality. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 91 , pp. 347-348.
10.1017/S0068246223000181

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068246223000181>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Sanctity and the Refashioning of Early Modern Catholicism: Saints and their Causes between Rome and Locality

Why did the Catholic Church, a faith defined by its cult of saints, find it so difficult to create new ones at the time of its greatest crisis? Historians have long noticed a long gap in saint-making following the Reformation. After 1523 there were to be no new saints for 63 years, a situation Peter Burke memorably attributed to a ‘failure of papal nerve’. Its hesitant resumption in 1588 created the modern machinery of canonisation but few benefitted. The path to sainthood was beset by bureaucratic hurdles and roadblocks, which remained in place until Pope John Paul II transformed canonisation into a veritable assembly line. The first post-Reformation saint – Carlo Borromeo – was not created until 1610; in 1634 a papal bull *Cælestis Hierusalem Cives* imposed further restrictions targeted explicitly at other *beati moderni* and was followed by another nearly 25-year pause.

So why was saint-making so difficult? I arrived at this question as a result of my interest in a group of Netherlandish martyrs, a diverse group of seventeen priests who died in 1572 and who were beatified by Pope Clement X in 1675. The witnesses who testified during their canonisation proceedings offer valuable and vivid testimony of the violence of the Dutch Revolt, but I quickly realized that what set their cause apart was the fact it was successful at all. The so-called martyrs of Gorkum were the only Catholics killed by Protestants to be beatified – part of the seventeenth-century reorganisation of saint-making – before 1700. *None* were canonised. Only one other martyr, Fidelis of Sigmaringen, was successful before the mid nineteenth century. The absence of such martyrs is a mystery. Narratives of martyrdom, of extreme violence and exemplary victimhood, stood at the centre of early modern religious conflict. Why were the martyrs of Gorkum the exception rather than the rule?

A comparative approach must be key to answering all of these questions. On the one hand causes competed against each other – they could not all be successful at the same time. On the other hand they were also cumulative, setting precedents that later causes could cite. My Balsdon fellowship allowed me to move beyond the trial documents I already knew and explore the causes of other aspiring saints, in particular other martyrs. In the Vatican Archives I read witness testimony gathered from places as diverse as Nagasaki, Goa, and Zaragoza. For my original martyrs of Gorkum project this wider set of sources helped me to identify factors that set the Dutch martyrs apart, and they helped me realize what their beatification actually was: an attempt to regulate and control a cult that had grown too big to be stamped out. That insight, plus visits to a host of other church archives – including those of the Inquisition – offers the beginning of an answer to the question with which I started: the thirst for new saints was, in fact, a dangerous thing. By resuming saint making the papacy unleashed forces that it struggled to control.

These are questions that I hope to explore as part of a larger research project in conjunction with the British School. Whatever the outcome of those future external grant applications, I am very grateful to the BSR for its generosity. My Balsdon fellowship proved to be an exceptionally enriching experience not just for my research, but also for me.

Jan Machielsen, Cardiff University