

Article

Carnival in Rome: The Tension of Pope Paul III's Dual Role Revisited

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Abstract: The papacy's authority and standing in the sixteenth century were harmed by the Martin Luther Reformation and the sacking of Rome. In order to uphold the legitimacy of the papal theocracy and to restore the papacy's cultural and intellectual authority, Pope Paul III brought back carnival celebrations in Rome. Paul III, a reformer, maintained an image of the pope as a spiritual leader who was "merciful" and "peaceful" using clever imagery; for instance, staging a "mask" procession which unites people while minimising ethnic and national disparities, thereby fostering a sense of community within the Catholic community. Reinforcing himself as a religious leader, Paul III was careful with the image of the papal monarchy in order to preserve the unity and independence of the Papal States. In the carnival floats, the pope introduced elements of pagan mythology, comparing himself to the consuls of ancient Rome to strengthen the pope's ties with society. He adopted Janus (the double-faced god) and Apollo (the sun god) to create a secular image of the pope as the patron saint of Rome. On the one hand, the spiritual image of Pope Paul III as a religious leader was prominent in the carnival celebrations, and on the other hand, the secular image of the pope helped to consolidate the authority of the pope and external defendant of the Papal States. The dual spiritual and secular image of the pope underwent constant changes during the celebrations, a process of tension that helped him to overcome, in part, the political and religious challenges of the early modern period and reflected the transitional and dual nature of the Catholic Church at the time.

Keywords: Pope Paul III; Roman carnival; spiritual and secular; the Counter-Reformation



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1. Introduction

Carnivals are joyous occasions for celebration (Turner 1982, pp. 2–5). Political figures, on the other hand, have shaped the images of festivities in order to control the memories of the attendees, display their political rights, and legitimise their authority (Malinowski 1990, pp. 11–15). In Renaissance Italy¹, the schedule for the Roman carnival² was overseen by the pope and other prominent church members, such as cardinals (Cussen 2020, p. 74). From the return of the popes to Rome in the fifteenth century until the sixteenth century, when several "Renaissance popes" focused on the Roman carnival and developed it to the extreme (Kinser 1990)—which had great cultural and artistic value, and was a very important model for the development of other political and religious rituals—the festival became a platform for the popes to present their image in the public sphere. However, even though the carnival was a celebration of widespread popular participation of a joyous kind, it has not received as much attention from researchers as the coronation of secular rulers and their ceremony of entering the city (Mulryne and Aliverti 2016; McGowan 2013; Mulryne et al. 2022). Not only was the content of the latter event designed to reflect the ritualisation of external power more visually (Bonnemaison and Macy 2008), but from an anthropological perspective, these illuminate the state's preparations for a particular festival and emphasise the stabilising role of group ritual celebrations in society. Carnivals, however, are more insidious and less stable.

Most depictions of Roman carnivals in celebrations are negative; initial studies of carnivals tend to equate it with the ancient Roman pagan festival of the gods of agriculture, where the rituals of the carnival were full of lascivious secularism, which was not conducive to social stability and purity of faith (Frazer 1990, pp. 583–86; van Dülmen 2004, p. 166). Due to this instability, studies of Roman carnivals seem to revolve around the perspective of the rulers from below, the “subversion of the lower classes” and the “hidden challenge to the dominant society” (Le Roy Ladurie 1979; Harris 2003, p. 141). The seriousness of the rulers’ intentions in organising the carnival, and even their attempts to change and shape the consciousness of the participants through the carnival, remained largely unnoticed. It was not until the rise of historical sociology that scholars re-examined their past impressions of the Roman carnival as “subversive” (Burke 1978, p. 119) and discovered that it not only mediated the relationship between the people and the gods, but also served as a political instrument of the rulers from above and below. As one of the top-down political instruments of the rulers, the Roman carnival also served to maintain social order (Gordon 1994).

However, there is a lack of in-depth thematic research on the historical changes behind such events. This is probably because, according to the “progressive” reading of Whig history, the Catholic-dominated celebrations are characterised as “superstitious” extravagances (Butterfield 1965, pp. 11–15; Sewell 2005, pp. 29–32). Another focus of the second celebration study is that analyses of religious and secular carnivals have been limited to their specific content and ideological connections (Turner and Turner 1995). Finally, previous studies of secularism have also failed to examine the historical changes in the image and power of the pope in the context of celebrations and culture as a whole, neglecting to examine the overall role of the pope in the carnival.

Under the impact of Renaissance secularism, a spiritually centred community ritual became a political occasion where the pope established his authority. However, paradoxically, as with the Church, in response to the Reformation and the emergence of the nation-state, the pope must also carefully distance himself from the image of a universal secular ruler. God will take care of the “flock”, and it is the spiritual authority given to Him that is the foundation of all papal power. It is easy to imagine that the process of portraying the pope as an important symbol of the carnival is complex and varied, and that the role is full of tension as it repeatedly shifts between the spiritual and the secular. Thus, this study employed the cultural theory of celebration in order to examine the tension of the pope’s dual role in the context of the Roman carnival from 1527 to 1549. This is in addition to the response of the early modern popes to historical shocks, based on the findings of prior studies.

2. The Pope and Roman Carnival

From the Middle Ages through to the contemporary age, the Roman Pontiff exerted significant influence in the perception of European culture, its spread, the establishment of an international order, and served as a pillar for the Catholic Church. From the height of the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, the papal leadership was shaken three times. The first was the Great Schism and the Captivity of Avignon, which saw the emergence of a triple papacy that significantly weakened the sanctity of the papacy, the latter resulting in the departure of the Holy See from Rome, the decline of Rome (the City of God), and the loss of papal independence for seventy years as a vassal of the secular rulers (the kings of France). When the Holy See returned to Rome, some popes became more involved than ever in politics, finance, and even leading armies directly in wars to restore the independence of the Papal States more quickly when their secular image overtook their religious role. Although the popes were keen to demonstrate their piety by making Rome the centre of the Renaissance with superb works of art, their secularisation and the institutionalised corruption of the papacy sparked criticism that they had deviated from their spiritual mission (e.g., Savonarola’s accusation against Alexander VI), a second crisis of the papal role. The third was Martin Luther’s repudiation of the papacy and the Church. Throughout

the three crises, the popes were pulled between spirituality and secularism. With the Holy See under pressure from theological schism and secular politics, it was unrealistic for the pope to pursue only one of these roles; thus, a loss of power on either side leaves the pope's leadership role in constant question, meaning that the pope must maintain a delicate balance between spirituality and secularity. The question is where and in what form will the pope choose to retain his dual image?

Rome was the best stage for the popes. After Martin V moved the Holy See back to Rome in 1417, through art, architecture, and literature, the humanist-educated popes after the Great Schism converted Rome into the "City of God": a symbol of unity, order, and peace, the centre of the Golden Age, such as in Virgil's pastoral poetry. Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455) and Sixtus IV (1471–1484) systematically transformed the urban space of Rome (Wang 2019), not only by strengthening papal rule through the efforts of the popes (Grinberg and Kinser 1983, p. 82), who gradually unified the urban space that had been divided by many families, but also by building grand architecture and beautiful frescoes, consolidating faith with art. Between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, an average of 10,000 pilgrims and church officials visited Rome annually. Furthermore, the number of worshippers reached 100,000 during the Jubilee years of the Atonement, thereby making Rome the true centre of Christendom at the time. The unique historical buildings and theological qualities in Rome inspired the pope to construct a portrait of himself and use it as a means of influencing the festivities.

Designed by the popes, the annual carnival is the most interesting programme in the sacred and magnificent arena of Rome. The first was Pope Paul II, who changed the original carnival, which was far from the city and rough in content, into a real celebration. Through the carnival, the pope strengthened his control over Rome, first by organising the celebrations to be more orderly than ever. For example, he planned the starting point for traditional races—starting at Via del Corso and ending at Piazza Venezia. After the competition, the pope also held a lavish banquet with fine cuisine and wine, as well as a banquet for the municipal governor and the local nobility. In addition to entertaining the elite, Paul II did not forget his ordinary faithful. When the banquet was over, the pope would throw coins out of the window to those who were not able to attend the banquet, demonstrating his kindness and generosity to the Roman faithful. Like a father returning home from his travels, who has been away from home for so long that his "children" have taken on a mind of their own, the pope uses "panem et circenses"³ to make his "children" happy and more dependent on him, as well as to show his power to those outsiders who covet the home. Pope Paul II also introduced a masquerade ball with pagan elements into the carnival, although this aroused opposition from some bishops (Gregorovius 1900, pp. 226–27). It is said that Paul II spent between 329 and 376 florins a year on the carnival (D'Elia 2009, p. 3). The Venetian-born pope hoped to gain the support of the Roman people through the carnival, and as myths of heroes, nymphs, and elves filled the city and cardinals rode through Rome in lavish triumphal cars, passers-by had begun to question whether the pope and the Roman clergy had become so absorbed in the world that they had forgotten their proper spiritual responsibilities (Infessura 1890, p. 265). The carnival was the best stage to help the pope shape his image with external rituals, both secular and spiritual, with the ultimate goal of strengthening papal authority. However, rather than bringing popes and the faithful closer together, the inventiveness of the design reinforced the social and cultural barrier between them instead.

As the influence of secularisation deepened, later popes spent more energy and money on organising carnival feasts, and popes preferred to celebrate the carnival in their own villas with the nobility rather than with the people. The city officials of Rome meticulously organised the ten-day carnival and the event efficiently distanced the papal "private feast" from the public, thereby ensuring that the carnival served both common citizens and the elite, including the pope.

During the reigns of Julius II (1503–1513) and Leo X (1513–1521), the carnivals attracted high-ranking clergy, diplomats, and officials; in addition, the popes invited princes and

dignitaries to lavish private celebrations. In 1518, as reported by Marcantonio Michele, the Venetian nobleman, in his diary: “the pope (Leo X) held a lavish meal for the cardinals who desired to attend, followed by a musical performance that cost 500 gold pieces.” Michele notes that the musical performance was broken into four parts: the first group of ten or so purple-clad musicians performed the Bergamasque; the second group of yellow-clad players performed a German tune spoken and played alternately on trombones and cornet; then, a third group, clothed in pink, alternated between singing and playing in a line while performing a Spanish song; and the final group consisted of boys singing English songs (Blackburn 1992). Near the conclusion of the performance, the instrumentalists and chorus vocalists performed together. Leo X attached greater importance to carnival artistry, such as music, and he wanted to impress the participants with sacred and elegant music. The records of the celebrations in 1520 clearly detail the musical arrangements in the carnival: percussionists, trumpeters, organists, etc. (Blackburn 1992; Cummings 2007).

The “private feasts” of Alexander VI and the two Medici popes, prior to Paul III, at the carnival were akin to the court feasts of other European secular kings and were intended to highlight the family rather than the Church. Due to the close proximity of Lent, the carnival was sometimes paired with Corpus Christi in order to give the holiday a more religious character. However, as per the perspective of past popes, the carnival was not religious but secular, private rather than public. When the pope stopped participating in processions and celebrated in his palace instead, it signified that he was distancing himself from the faithful; when the pope used the lavish private feast to demonstrate his family’s power, it demonstrated that he was more of a Roman monarch than a fisherman’s (i.e., St. Peter’s) successor. Martin Luther criticised the pope in 1527 for “abandoning the faith and reigning for the devil” following the destruction of Rome (Luther 2010, pp. 50–54). The theology of the wrath of God was extensively disseminated and partially reflected the discontent of the faithful with the pope’s preoccupation with the world and disregard for the religion.

The pope was the emblem of the Roman Church’s authority and the vicegerent of God upon Earth. However, the incarceration of Clement VII and the destruction of Rome in 1527 drastically decreased the pope’s position as the ruler of Rome. Paul III stood at the crossroads of the secular game that was unfolding, and it was exceedingly challenging for him to reweigh the functions of the pope in this time period. In his report, Clement’s advisor Ghiberti stated: “(At this time), Rome witnessed nothing but ruin, not only of Clement VII, but also of his country (the Papal States) and all of Italy, and our entire reputation was destroyed at this time” (Pastor 1901, p. 360). The bodies left behind by the war spread disease across the city of Rome, which was particularly unfortunate as it occurred alongside the strong propaganda of Luther’s “wrath of God” condemnations: “[the pope] was chastised for confounding the word of God with lies (relating to the destruction of Rome)” (Pastor 1901, p. 402).

The foundation of the pope’s faith was disrupted, both as the secular ruler of Rome and as the head of the Catholic Church. The slogan “Reform Rome, reform the world” had provided the reformists with the upper hand within the Holy See (Malley 2010, p. 192); thus, through all of this turmoil, where does one begin to restore the pope’s authority? Popes have utilised the carnival’s nature as a political ritual performance in order to recast their position. The imitation of religious and liturgical forms was a standard feature of medieval and Renaissance popular culture. Michele remarked, “Rome’s Carnival was vibrant due to the hunts, comedy, and other celebrations . . . it was a significant holiday for the Romans” (Blackburn 1992, pp. 4–5). Carnival celebrations emphasised the Church and Rome’s cultural and historical context, as well as provided opportunities for political and social interaction. Paul III (1534–1549) laid the groundwork for the strengthening of the papal position in the Roman carnival by drawing on the experience of his predecessor’s carnival preparations and the new idea of papal power. He aimed to restore the majesty of the papacy and the autonomy of the papal kingdoms in order to revitalise Rome after its destruction. As the historian of the pope in the eighteenth century, Paster remarked, “If the Pope (Paul III) wished to reconstruct the splendour of the Roman Carnival before the

sacking of 1527, i.e., during the reign of Leo X (1513–1521), it would have been difficult” (Gamrath 2007, p. 47; Burckhardt 2007, p. 163). In the arena of the carnival, the pope had to deal with a complex relationship that developed between the religious and secular spheres, and the dual role of the missing one made it necessary for Pope Paul III to maintain tension between the two. On the one hand, the pope is expected to uphold the religious principles of the Church and to provide spiritual guidance to the faithful. On the other hand, the pope was also a political ruler who was required to make decisions that benefited the Papal States, such as participating in diplomatic negotiations between Charles V and François I, raising taxes on the Papal States and maintaining military power. The pope is often criticised; thus, their actions are often perceived as decisions that are politically motivated rather than guided by spiritual principles, or even as the pursuit of political power for the pope himself or his family at the expense of religious ideals.

At a time when Lutherans attacked the secularity of papal behaviour and questioned the orthodoxy of papal and ecclesiastical power, the famous Jesuit, Robert Bellarmine, of the same century presented a new theory of power: the “indirect power of the pope”. This was also the start of the “indirect” concept. Moreover, the “indirect” approach acknowledges that the pope has no influence in secular concerns, but instead relies on the pope’s position of faith as head of the Church. This approach in repositioning the emphasis where papal authority is located was performed in order to emphasise that the pope possesses indirect power over secular matters when it serves spiritual (i.e., faith-based) reasons (Sabine 2015, p. 81). Bellarmine’s “indirect power” appears, on the face of it, to be a submission of papal theocracy to secular powers, but it actually means that the only power in the world that derives directly from God is the power of the pope, whereas the power of kings is secular, and therefore not divinely ordained, in nature and origin. As arbiters of faith, the Church and the standing pope must necessarily be independent of secular authority.

In order to lessen the detrimental impact of the standing pope’s virtues on the function and role of the pope as a whole, the Church neutralised the religious basis for a pope’s authority through Roman law. This was achieved by emphasising that the pope’s legitimacy originates from the office he inherits from St. Peter, and not, therefore, from the moral character of his successor (Ullmann 2010, pp. 40–42). “Indirect power” led Paul III to realise that a celebration such as the carnival, which was widely attended by the faithful, had a high political value in and of itself. Furthermore, the pope, or his close associates, would frequently design the event’s content and flow in order to mitigate the risks involved (Rebecchini 2007, p. 163). In light of the emergence of Lutheranism, the sack of Rome, and the calls for ecclesiastical reform, the function of the secular prince—similar to that of Julius II—had diverged from the role of the spiritual leader on which the pope was established. Thus, the excessive secular role of the pope in the past no longer fits reality, and the weight it occupies should be redistributed. As such, it was through the carnival that the pope demonstrated his indispensable spiritual responsibility in Rome and in Europe. Paul III portrayed himself as a spiritual leader representing the heir of Rome, as well as the leader of peace in the carnival rites in order to obtain the support of the Church elite and the public. Moreover, unlike the “private dinners” of the past, the pope took the initiative to participate in the carnival, thereby exhibiting a calm and approachable attitude to the general people, which partially met the expectations of the Church reformers. In contrast to the “private feast” of the past, the pope’s involvement in the carnival (Hibbert 2018, p. 222) and his calm and friendly demeanour towards the general public satisfied the reformers of the Church and won the backing of international opinion at the time.

In addition to the three reasons mentioned above, the following two points also require our attention. One is the geography of the Italian region. The city of Rome itself was relatively gentle. Furthermore, the whole city inherited the design of the ancient Roman roads; as such, it was in good condition for paving and thus in a good condition for Italian processions on foot, which, in time, developed into a magnificent parade of costumed floats. Secondly, there was financial pressure from the Holy See. The carnival was accompanied by the purchase and sale of atonement vouchers, as well as other trade and economic transac-

tions that helped ease the papacy's financial difficulties. The carnival provided an excellent political arena for the shape of the papal image. However, because of the transitional nature of early modern Europe, the pope could not completely abandon his role as the Italian region's secular prince, especially during a crisis of faith when papal prerogatives were under fierce attack. However, the pope had to maintain a balance between his dual secular and spiritual roles; at the particular time of the Lutheran Reformation and the Roman catastrophe, Paul III had to clarify the primacy of the pope's spiritual responsibilities and demonstrate the pastoral competence of the papacy to the world.

3. Peace and Reform: A Return to the Pope's Spiritual Leadership Role

Burckhardt commented, "I am afraid that nowhere is Carnival activity as richly varied as in Rome" (Burckhardt 2007, p. 153). The fall of the Roman carnival in 1545 was the end of the "classical carnival" (Mooney 1988, p. 13). This sentiment was most true under Pope Paul III (1534–1549), where the combination of religious rituals and daily festivities reached its peak in Rome and was thus known as the Golden Age of Renaissance art and culture (Pastor 1912, p. 352). The extensive use of artistic imagery in order to express one's political aspirations through symbolism and metaphor was one of the hallmarks of Renaissance politics. The images that express the culture that shaped Paul were, in turn, used by him to shape others (Stinger 1985, pp. 40–41). Humanist scholars were adept at associating the portrayal of magnificence with the glory and fame of an individual or group, using classical themes to restore the consciousness of ancient Rome (Visceglia 2013, pp. 276–78). The humanist-educated popes naturally portrayed the Roman carnival as a bridge between the ancient Roman Empire and the Papal States, a bridge deeply rooted in historical tradition and spirituality, thereby advocating a combination of the symbols of Roman civilisation with the Catholic faith. In order to adapt to the new situation, Paul III returned to his role as spiritual leader of the medieval patristic theology in the face of the frustration of the Church's struggle for secular power. Therefore, he combined the maintenance of peace in Christendom, the reform of the Church, and the consolidation of secular power into one approach. Through skilful political manoeuvres and practical reform initiatives, he worked to project the image of a godly, tolerant, and committed spiritual leader in his social and cultural activities.

Through the guise of carnival floats, competitions, and artistic decorations symbolising "peace" and "mercy", art was employed in the service of authority in order to characterise Pope Paul III. The topic of the carnival in 1545 was "Victory and Peace": the former was a celebration of the papal victory over the heretics and Turks, while the latter was a commemoration of the peace achieved at Nice by Charles V and Francois I, through the pope's mediation. As a result, a significant proportion of the 1545 carnival schedule carried specific symbolism, such as the costumes worn by Paul III at carnival festivities. The unicorn depicted on each side of the dress is not only part of the Farnese family's coat of arms, but also occurs frequently in paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a symbol of justice and harmony. On the back of the papal robe, a chameleon and dolphin, the slowest and fastest moving animals in Roman mythology, served as a reminder to rulers that political action should be neither too rapid nor too slow, which also alluded to the pope's reform measures for the Church (Pastor 1912, pp. 349–68). In addition, the centrepiece of the carnival, the allegorical floats, had as their topic "the triumph of Paulus Aemilius, the Roman consul" (Forcella 1885, pp. 22–26), which was a reference to a popular Renaissance work. This reference is documented in the well-known Renaissance biography *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*. Paulus' image of unbiased erudition and patronage was used as a complement to Pope Paul III, not only because they had the same name, but also due to the fact that they were both committed to maintaining the spirit and authority of ancient Rome. In the setting of the destruction of Rome and the growth of heresy, the popes were ridiculed and questioned, compelling them to adopt a pragmatic approach with regards to their depiction. In the pageant, the unicorn, Paulus, and others served as particular symbols, thereby continuing the papal image. Paul III used

religious symbols in order to convey to the faithful the values of peace and mercy, as well as to portray himself as a kind and tolerant “father”, thereby diluting the secular image and sense of nation-state that had characterised the previous popes’ involvement in European political wrangling and their attempts in preserving the Catholic Church’s leadership.

Paul III put the interests of the Church first, personally participating in the carnival processions in order to highlight the role of the spiritual leader, turning what had been a private papal family “feast” into a public celebration. The elaborate carnival programme allowed Romans to enjoy traditional festivities and freedoms, while bringing the pope closer and thus helping to win over the faithful, as well as to attract their support for his rule. Carnival events were some of the few that did not emphasise status. Therefore, both popes and laypeople, clergy and merchants, etc., were allowed to appear on the same occasion. The “masks” of the celebrations concealed secular ethnic and status differences, thereby highlighting the commonality between the Catholic faithful and the Romans. It was through the “joyous, grand” carnival that the urban damage incurred during the destruction of Rome, as well as religious pessimism, were gradually diluted. The identity of the Roman faithful was reawakened, and periodic events reinforced cohesion of the faith. As the procession moved through the streets, almost everyone was dressed in costumes and masks (Cussen 2020, p. 76). Even the houses that the procession passed were decorated, people on the upper floors leaned on carpeted and tapestry-lined balconies and people on the street threw flowers and branches. The carnival events brought the pope directly into the presence of the lower classes, not only to fully manifest his divine role, but, more importantly, to strengthen the ties between the Roman Church and the masses. Paul III was particularly popular with the Roman people, as he was the first pope born in Rome after the end of the Great Schism. As such, the Roman people hoped that he would restore the image of the pope to its former glory.

There is no doubt that group rituals can enhance group cohesion and help to reinforce the image of the pope as a dominant figure, but there is also a risk that the “Carnival” can become too out of hand. How could order be maintained during the carnival, restrain the people’s emotional expressions, and keep the “safety valve” in check⁴? For this reason, the other elite of Paul III’s profession not only sponsored the carnival celebrations and programmed a wealth of entertainment, but they even allowed the performance of political satire by clown actors and burlesque that mocked the content of the clergy. The carnival was, thus, also a papal response to criticism and a measure of social stability; moreover, this Pasquino-style⁵ satire possessed a long history. The Portuguese painter Francesco d’Olanda, who lived in Rome, described the celebrations as “feasts, balls, illuminations, the whole city, especially Castel Sant’Angelo, seeming to rise in flames, and dazzling races between horses, cows and buffaloes” (Pastor 1912, p. 351).

The carnival portrays the pope as the image of God’s devoted shepherd, bringing the splendour of Christ to the globe. On the eleventh float of the 1545 carnival, the inscription “What was lost in Europe is regained in the New World” appeared above a ship-of-the-line crossing the Pillars of Hercules, then representing the Strait of Gibraltar, with the inscription “Their word is spread throughout the world,” symbolising Christianity’s salvation in the New World. The Pillars of Hercules bore an inscription that read, “Their word was spoken throughout the earth, symbolising Christian salvation in the New World.” In addition, on the ninth and four succeeding floats, three demonstrate the victory of the one-eyed Arimasian over the gryphon; the victory of Heraclius over Sidrodus; and the battle between the three Turks and the three Christians (Premoli 1981, pp. 173–74; Visceglia 2013). This last demonstration (the victory of Turazin over the barbarians) was chosen to depict victories over the Turks (Pastor 1912, pp. 453–54).

The purpose of both the procession of floats and the theatrical production was to highlight the role of the papal religious leader and to combat the prevalent religious pessimism in Rome at the time. The mid- to late-sixteenth century context was marked externally by the Turkish naval harassment around Sicily, where Sultan Suleiman even considered adding Rome to his empire, as well as internally by the sacking of 1527, which

not only devastated the city but also damaged the reputation and power of the Holy See, i.e., through the greed of the clergy, the abandoned grassroot monasteries, the Church's influence over the disappearance of school influence, and popular indifference to orthodoxy. Under the influence of faith, Paul III utilised the Jesuits, Capuchins, and other orders in order to develop a personnel advantage of highly educated and disciplined missionaries; on the other hand, he negotiated with Catholic princes involved in the great geographical discoveries to gain support for a route to send missionaries to the colonies and Far East. The socialising function of carnival processions frequently combined spirituality and entertainment with the promotion of the Church as a whole, of the city (or countryside), and of the religious and secular organisations involved; consequently, the pope's uniqueness and orthodoxy as a spiritual leader were articulated in numerous aspects of the ritual.

The power of the celebration resides in its ability to turn the fleeting image of the ritual into a more permanent one, thus transforming the here and now into an aspirational journey. The Roman carnival is both a continuance of Romano-Christian culture and a symbol of the future of Christendom, due to its classical nature. Through the symbols and historical traditions of the celebration, Paul III demonstrated that the city of Rome as the seat of the papacy could be conquered, but that Rome as the city of God was always victorious. Moreover, he demonstrated that a monarch of the Papal States could be imprisoned, but that the pope, as the spokesman for Christ, ruled Christendom in a more legitimate fashion than the secular monarchs. Fundamental to the move from secular monarchs to religious leaders, is the emphasis on the primacy of the spiritual realm over the secular world. The pope had a dual role of secular monarch and religious leader, but as a reformer; at this time, Paul III emphasised the primacy of the spiritual realm over the secular world.

Whether or not the pope should join in carnival activities was also debated within the Church, reflecting the fact that the definition of the pope's function during the Catholic Reformation was also undergoing a battle between old and new beliefs. For example, Savonarola's "Bonfire of the Vanities" propounded that the appearance of carnival masks and costumes is immoral, and that they should be burned in the city's public festivities to eliminate the sin (Ruggiero 2014, pp. 490–91). Paul IV was represented by his seeming hostility to costly performances; nevertheless, in essence, he insisted on a return to theology. This included a rejection of idolatry, as well as a rejection of celebrations that had pagan connotations. The advocates, however, persisted with the humanist notion that God is something that all people share, and the practice of celebrating religion on public holidays is an act of increasing one's faith and piety. As the voice of God in the secular world, it was natural for the pope to organise and join in the celebrations. Erasmus, in his "Praise of Foll" from "Moriae Encomium", expresses the human need for carnival laughter, because it liberates us from our bondage (Watson 1979). The expanding celebrations, in turn, led to a great appreciation of the city's culture and the enormous carnival celebrations led to Rome being deliberately fashioned as a place of pilgrimage, such that those who came from both near and afar could return home with an image of the "pope".

4. Myth and History: The Secular Image of the Pope

Some scholars have argued that the Holy See and the pope had fallen into disrepute in the face of the nation-state's emergence in the sixteenth century, the spread of Lutheranism, and the aftermath of the sacking (Reeves 2019, pp. 56–58). However, this was not the case, as Clement VII's return to the Vatican and his restoration of Rome as the "place of glory", followed by Paul III's efforts to rebuild Rome and restore the reputation of the Church, effectively eased the conflict between the pope and the population of Rome. Furthermore, the rivalry between France and the Holy Roman Empire over the Italian regions stimulated a sense of nationhood in Italy, i.e., Italian nationalism. Although the Reformation undermined the power of the Catholic Church as the universal Church in Europe, the pope's control over Italy was strengthened when he embarked on the Counter-Reformation. As such, in the tension with his spiritual role, his image as a secular monarch was briefly revived.

The pope combines his image with that of the Roman emperors in the ceremonies associated with the emperors' carnival. As early as the floats that were present in the Julius II carnival programme, humanist intellectuals supported by the pope frequently honoured the pope alongside the old Roman monarchs (Stinger 1985, pp. 57–60). In addition to the 1536 tribute to the pope—including the picture of the old Roman consul Paulus—the 1539 carnival event featured the pope in full regalia, surrounded by Roman city officials dressed in the garb of this ancient Roman Empire period. The image of civic officials encircling the religious leader was adopted in order to emphasise secular actions of the popes as political leaders of the Papal States, while disregarding their pastoral and missionary roles as leaders of the Roman Catholic Church (Fois 2001, pp. 291–301). Pope Paul III also asked his son and other members of the Farnese family to partake in the carnival of 1541, a gesture reminiscent of the Medici family's splendour under Leo X. Cardinal Farnese (grandson of Paul III) wore an old Roman costume at the banquet following the carnival, an act of pagan idolatry by the papal family that prompted criticism from the then Cardinal Caraffa (later Paul IV) and Contarini (Liu 2020, p. 365). The first float of the 1545 carnival depicted Androcles removing a thorn from the palm of a lion, flanked by the statement, "The submissive will be favoured, and the proud will be defeated." In this scenario, the symbol of Rome, Andronicus, represents the pope, and the "thorn" on the lion denotes heresy. These celebration symbols, mixed with old Greco-Roman analogies, communicate the pope's will through sight, sound, and touch.

In the carnival celebrations, the pope wove a network of economic and social interests, transforming the city's aristocracy into a court nobility under the papal family and luring nobles from other parts of Italy into the orbit of Rome, as the symbols of these events were intended to consolidate consensus (Prodi 2006, p. 104). Whether it was the triumphal performance of Augustus' victory over Cleopatra at the carnival of Paul II, or the eleven triumphal floats prepared for the carnival of Alexander VI in 1500 in honour of Julius Caesar, the founder of the ancient Roman Empire, the main purpose of the performance was to bring the magnificent scenes of war into the city of Rome, so that the people in Rome and foreign ambassadors could feel the great power of the Holy See. The carnival grafted the splendour and power of antiquity onto the here and now, bringing the political forces of antiquity and the present side by side in the name of recalling the glory of ancient Rome. Through the language of ritual, the popes speak and communicate with all sectors of society, turning this occasion of public celebration into a stage for the display of personal political power.

This was a continuation of the mediaeval theological and political concept of the "two swords" and the "sun and moon", which aimed to construct a universal Christian empire and proclaim the pope as God's sole representative in the secular world. By reproducing the Roman scenario in the procession and painting it aesthetically, the pope achieved a synthesis of ancient and modern images, thereby making this visual treasure as unforgettable to future generations as his subsequent reform endeavours. This approach was founded on the rich heritage of Rome and its distinct sense of urban honour, as well as the classical nature of a carnival, which is both a continuation of Romano-Christian culture, as well as a symbol of the future of Christendom—which is to say, peace and unity.

The original purpose of the celebration was to honour the mythological beings or totems of the town (Burke 2005, p. 113). In addition, the original purpose of the Roman carnival was to honour Saturnus, the god of agriculture. In the carnival of Paul III, however, references to the golden period, for instance, after the return of the god of agriculture were used to refer to the return of the pope to Rome after the sacking, as well as to bring "peace and justice" to Rome during Paul III's reign, a golden age of peace and righteousness. The event connects the pope to Saturn, the god of agriculture; Janus, the double-faced god; and Apollo, the god of the sun. Even though the carnival atmosphere is one of recklessness and excess, "the architectural monuments along the carnival path, every street corner where the Pope would pass, and the triumphal arches are decked with statues bearing specific titles and meanings" (Canova 1998). These celebratory symbols repeatedly represented to

the audience that the pope was the patron of Rome and the heir to St. Peter's inheritance, thereby sanctifying authority through rituals, such as the parade of floats and eliciting the adoration and devotion of the devout. Janus, the double-faced god, welcomes Saturnus, the god of agriculture exiled by Jupiter, into Rome—this is a scene borrowed from Ovid's *Chronicle of the Ages*, together with the account of the Golden Age in Virgil's pastoral poetry⁶.

The repeated emphasis on the Golden Age is a reference to the pope's contribution to the peace of Rome through the signing of the Pact of Nice—which he mediated—and to the return of justice and piety, as well as humility and integrity under the pope's reign. As such, the "ancient" virtues are revived and his return to Rome ushers in a new era for the Papal States. In addition, the float is adorned with a statue of the god of agriculture seated on a rock carved into the mountain of Janiculum, holding a sickle in one hand and the keys given to him by Janus in the other, in tandem with the Latin inscription "His quondam latuisset tutus in the oris" (Safe and sound on these shores) (Forcella 1885, p. 74). The key given to the god of agriculture by Janus, as well as the safety under his protection, signify the return of papal power after the sack and his resolve to defend Rome. Additionally, the float being laden with gold and treasure was a clear symbol of the return of the Golden Age, when plunder was a thing of the past and Rome was once again at the head of the world (Caput Mundi). The link between the pope and Apollo, the sun god, is based on the "sun and moon theory": the king derives power from the pope in the same way that the moon receives light from the sun. In confirming his authority, the pope also fought against his opponents, the "serpent" was repeated in the context of the Reformation as a sign of heresy, i.e., the opposition of evil. In this vein, the 1539 papal float depicted Apollo fighting a python. The Castel Sant'Angelo frescoes portraying Apollo as the executioner of mortals also represent the pope's claim to secular sovereignty. The impression given to the world by the floats, orchestras, cavalry, and massed pilgrims of the 1536–1548 carnival was a return to the splendid art and power of the Holy See, whether it was Janus, Saturnus, or Apollo in the parade of floats, in which these artistic symbols reaffirmed the supremacy of ecclesiastical power over kings, while portraying the pope as a symbol of victory over heresy. This shows that Paul III's role in the carnival remained predominantly spiritual, and that he was supposed to be neutral and coordinated with Christendom. However, with the French Captivity of Avignon and Charles V's Roman Sack still fresh in the mind, it was difficult to preserve the independence of the Papal States in the fiercely changing sixteenth century based on the role of the spiritual leader of the papacy alone. Moreover, the Lutheran claim directly denied the role of the pope and the Church as a "bridge" to God, and the pope needed multiple forces to strengthen the faith and position of the Catholic Church.

Thus, the clergy reaffirmed the secular authority of the pope. "(The Pope) unites the greatness of the Roman Empire and the Church, unites Augustus with the peace of Christ, and the Pope must be both the guardian and defender of the greatest authority." Agostino Steuco, a prominent papal humanist at the time, defended Paul III, arguing that the pope's temporal power and income were essential to the spiritual welfare of humankind (Delph 1992). He reasoned that external forms of piety were needed in order to maintain reverence for God. The rituals of celebration and the tangible signs of sanctity were essential for regulating social and civic behaviour. Furthermore, they reflected society's desire to maintain its faith, traditions, and the spirit of the nation. Secular power and revenue enabled the pope to maintain the pomp and splendour of the objects of worship, thereby promoting piety and religion. Steuco insisted that outward forms of religion should be maintained with pomp and circumstance, i.e., treated with solemn pomp. He asserted that this visible display of piety and sanctity was necessary due to the fact that most people were limited in knowing God in any way other than through outwardly tangible rituals. He also stressed that the display of power and wealth fosters respect for authority in the minds of men and that the secular power and wealth of the pope are essential in order to highlight the spiritual dignity of the papacy. By acquiring wealth from the secular and holding grand

ceremonies, the pope fulfilled his role as a spiritual leader. Paris de' Grassi, a cardinal and papal liturgist, also wrote a book instructing the faithful to achieve self and collective holiness through participation in liturgical activities. Grassi further emphasised that the activities were not intended to accentuate the tedious steps of the liturgy but rather seek to cultivate a relationship with God through liturgical expression (Desilva 2012). Marsilio Ficino stated that: "The fact that God created man in his image means that one is born a religious creature, [one] is rightly imbued with an innate consciousness of God and the desire to worship him" (Kristeller 1961). With the flourishing of the printing industry in the sixteenth century, pamphlets, books, and articles on Catholic orthodoxy held a monopoly in Rome after the Council of Trent. While issues of salvation, faith, and biblical interpretation remained central to everyday life, the pope's authoritative power to interpret doctrine was particularly important. The extension of secular power in the clergy's doctrine of "indirect power" cannot be ignored, which succeeded in shaping the secular monarchical side of the papacy in the late Renaissance. However, it must be emphasised that the secularity of the pope is for the betterment of the rule of the Papal States and the preservation of his spiritual role.

Some scholars have referred to celebratory festivals as ways in which to respond to crises in the form of "charismatic" rule (Mitchell 2013). Lynette Mitchell explained it thus: displaying the virtues and merits of a historical or mythical hero through a festival uses the sanctity of this inheritance to gain legitimacy for (the ruler's) power. The ruler is expected to possess more virtues (or commonalities) than other people who are mythical heroes or historical figures. Through celebration, these "virtues" adorned the ruler and conferred on him the status of a god. It was this idea which was echoed under Paul III, with the incorporation of humanist ideas of virtue and nobility. Through his symbolic imagery, the pope displayed his mythical virtues and heroism in the pageant, in addition to publicly proclaiming the classical humanism of the Renaissance through the elaborate fireworks, sculptures, and fountains of the spectacle.

5. Conclusions

In the eyes of contemporary scholars, the early modern popes are a puzzling and contradictory group of historical figures. This is due to the fact that, in contrast to the Renaissance popes of the fifteenth century, after 1527 the pope had to face unprecedented and urgent tensions in his spiritual and secular roles. There was a greater emphasis on spiritual leadership as a response to the major social changes of the time. The popes borrowed from the carnival celebrations, playing a flexible dual role. In order to mix their image with political objectives, the popes borrowed from carnival festivities. In the procession of floats, for instance, the popes identified with legendary Roman heroes, thereby producing an image of spiritual leadership as "calm" and "benevolent"; as such, therefore, implying that the popes were employing a "neutral" diplomatic policy. Furthermore, this type of action was taken by the papal office in response to the French and Holy Roman Empires. This was conducted in response to the competition between France and the Holy Roman Empire in Italy, as well as to further prevent diplomatic blunders, such as the Sack of Rome. From the signing of peace treaties and missions abroad, to the victories over and the punishment of European heretics, the symbols of these celebrations were used in order to represent the pope as a reformer who defended the faith and maintained Christendom's peace. The popes, having been schooled in humanism, were fully aware of the function of pageantry in maintaining social ties; furthermore, the images depicted at the ceremonies were crucial for the faithful to recognise and defend the religion. The fight for secular authority from the Middle Ages resulted in a reduction in the status of the popes as representatives of the Church in Europe during the sixteenth century. However, there was a temporary resurrection of their function as secular monarchs when the popes gained control in Rome and Italy. This secularity is no longer a papal indulgence in family selfishness, but a secular political means of preserving independence of the papal state. Through the story of "indirect power" and the inclusion of the image of ancient Roman

emperors, the popes emphasised their role as successors to the empire in carnival events, thus suggesting the unchallengeable political authority of the Pope in response to the Reformation.

In the early days of the Counter-Reformation, to rebuild the city of Rome, the carnival was one way the Church tried to reassert its authority and influence over the people. In addition, the carnival attracted many ordinary believers, and the Church used the celebration to counter the influence of Protestantism and promote traditional religious practices and rituals. The pope used artistic design to organise parades featuring religious figures and symbols as a central part of the carnival, which helped reinforce the Church's presence and the importance of the Catholic faith. Finally, the marvellous spectacle and elaborate costumes in the carnival showcased the wealth and power of the Catholic Church and the pope, strengthening the prestige of the Church. Paul III wanted to counteract the spread of Protestantism in the carnival and maintain its dominance in a rapidly changing religious environment.

Pope Paul III's dual role as both secular monarch and religious leader during the carnival may seem fraught with tension between the two roles. However, suppose the secular role of the pope as a protector of the religious leader. In that case, it helps us better understand the pope's balancing of spiritual duties and political obligations, because the common goal of the tension remains the consolidation of the Catholic faith as a religious purpose. This was not only as a political act of the pope, but essentially as the change in attitude towards humanism after the reformation of the Church. Christian humanism laid the foundations for Western culture. However, with the decline in humanism in the sixteenth century, the Lutheran Reformation, and the rigidity of Church theology, the synthesis between faith and reason in Renaissance humanism was undermined, especially by the rise of the nation-state, which collapsed the synthesis between universal faith and reason, theology, philosophy, and science. With the gradual disintegration of humanism in decline, the pope's side as a spiritual leader came under the most violent attack. For this reason, he needed to show his other side as a secular monarch to maintain the need to rule in reality; Paul III used his dual role to build up strength for the Counter-Reformation. This was particularly evident in the case of the carnival.

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Notes

- ¹ It is important to clarify the concept of Italy, in the sixteenth century; although the concept of "italia" (Italy) appeared in written texts and the Italian language (then called Tuscan) was widely used, it was not a cultural or national proxy. However, Italy was not a proxy for a culture or a country, it was simply a geographical concept.
- ² Roman carnival has been interpreted differently at different points in history. It is generally accepted that Roman carnival events originated from the ancient Roman pagan celebration of Lupercalia (15 February). Citing the ancient Roman grammarian, Marcus Terentius Varro explicitly referred to this festival as a celebration of fertility and purification. To welcome spring and celebrate regeneration, Lupercalia is filled with wine and sexual desire. The Romans respected the celebration of Lupercalia, the Roman poet Ovid describes Lupercalia in his work *Fasti* ("The Festivals"). In the late fifth century, Lupercalia was denounced by early Christians (Pope Gelasius I) as sinful, but the early church had a difficult time eradicating the tradition. Therefore, they undertook the more prudent thing, transforming many pagan customs and rituals into festivals and scheduling them. The pagan origins of carnival include the widely recognised Lupercalia in February, the Festival of the God of Wine in spring, and the Saturnalia and Brumalia in December. After the Roman Empire accepted Christianity, carnival became more Christian in meaning and became a religious celebration. Carnival seems to derive from the Italian word "carne", which explains its Christian origin. In Italian, "carne levare" means "to remove meat", while in Latin "carne vale" means "farewell to meat". Moreover, the fertility of Lupercalia seems to be replaced by Valentine's Day; Saturnalia and Brumalia were converted into Christmas and merged with the church's teachings about the birth of Jesus. The carnivals in this thesis occurred during the 15th–16th century Roman celebrations,

scheduled before Lent, the 40-day period of fasting and solemnity before Easter. These public celebrations typically included street parties, parades, balls, or some other form of entertainment. Carnival continued to evolve and became a manifestation of European folk culture. (Green 1931; Tennant 1988; McLynn 2008).

- 3 "Panem et circenses" means bread and circuses; sustenance and entertainment provided by the government to appease public discontent.
- 4 Anthropologists such as Eva Hunt see group rituals as a special mechanism through which the oppressed can release their repressed frustrations and hostility, while the status quo is maintained. At the same time, people felt important in the presence of their rulers, a "political safety valve" in the psychological sense. See later Davis's analysis of sixteenth-century French carnivals in this way. (Davis 1971; Hunt 1969).
- 5 In addition to being known as the "talking statue", the Pasquino is a relic from the Hellenistic period of Rome (3rd–1st century BC). This crude marble statue, although seemingly unimpressive, is one of the symbols of civil liberties. This politically satirical sculpture remained a part of popular culture until the 19th century.
- 6 The double head of Janus symbolises the past and the present, and Janus' welcome back to Rome (Lazio) of Saturnus, the god of agriculture, heralds the Golden Age. The god of agriculture, for it is generally believed that Kronos, also known as Saturnus, ruled over mankind in the Golden Age. The return of the "Virgo" and the "god of agriculture" in ancient Roman allegory refers to the return of the Golden Age, a time as beautiful as the Golden Age. Virgil's Pastoral IV also mentions that "Now the last age of Cumae's prophecy has come/The great succession of centuries is born afresh/Now too returns the Virgin/ Saturn's rule returns/A new begetting now descends from heaven's height.O chaste Lucina/ look with blessing on the boy/Whose birth will end the iron race at last and raise/A golden through the world: now your Apollo rules./And, Pollio, this glory enters time with you." (Virgil 1984).

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