

## ABSTRACT

Divine Apologia: The Image Restoration Discourse of Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict Surrounding the Historic Vatican Sex Abuse Summit

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Crisis can threaten the legitimacy and viability of even the largest and most resilient of organizations. The discursive strategies that organizations employ to navigate and respond to the crisis, are key to their ultimate success or failure in managing their own organizational identity, as well as member identities. This study engages in a textual analysis of the organizational communication used by Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict in response to the ongoing child sex-abuse scandal. Specifically, this project examines communications during a unique time for the Catholic Church, in which there essentially conflicting leadership messages.

Divine Apologia: The Image Restoration Discourse of Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict Surrounding the Historic Vatican Sex Abuse Summit

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Communication

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Arts

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May 2020

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to show my gratitude by dedicating this work to my family and the special person who supported me, showed an abundance of kindness and believed in me even when I wasn't sure if I believed in myself. First, I want to give my sincerest appreciation to my husband, Matt, and two children Gavin and Reagan, because without your support on the home front, I would not have been able to devote attention to my graduate studies. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lacy McNamee. Lacy, without your insightful direction, caring support, detailed editing, and constant words of encouragement this thesis, as well as my graduate studies, would not have been what they are today. Thank you so much for all your time and work helping me become a better academic member. Finally, thank you to my thesis committee, Dr. Lacy McNamee, Dr. David Schlueter, and Dr. Tony Talbert. Thank you all for taking time to serve on my committee and for your thoughtful consideration of this work.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

All organizations undergo some sort of crisis, large or small, within their lifetime. These crises can threaten even the strongest and largest of organizations. The key to weathering the crisis is how an organization chooses to respond. The strategies and methods that organizations use to navigate and respond to the crisis are crucial to their inevitable success or failure in managing their own organizational identity, as well as member identities. Adding to the already complex nature of organizational crisis communication, religious organizations have what could be described as a greater sphere of influence or personal impact with their audiences. For example, when a corporate organization experiences crisis, say a failed product, they risk bankruptcy, stakeholder uncertainty, lawsuits, etc. But what happens if that organization is one's religion and that product is one's faith? The breadth and depth of impact religious organizations possess is but one reason why examining their crisis communication is of grave importance.

Arguably, the Catholic Church is one of the religious institutions most plagued by crisis throughout its existence. By the 1990s, cases of sexual abuse by the Church had caught the attention of the media. Perhaps most notably, in 2002, the Boston Globe shone new light on horrible abuses at the hands of Catholic clergy (Boston Globe, 2002, para. 1). In addition to thousands of cases of children who had been sexually abused by clergy, the scandal also exposed the cover up happening within the Catholic Church to protect those abusers. Pope John Paul II led investigations of abuse and condemned the abuse as

the antithesis of the teachings of Jesus. Three years later, his successor, Pope Benedict, apologized and further condemned the abuse, but offered no further strategy to combat the problem. The image restoration strategies that the Church employed were highly criticized for their pervasive use of blame shifting and differentiation, or the process where “the act is distinguished from other similar but more offensive actions” (Benoit, 1997, p. 181). Then in 2013, Pope Benedict surprisingly resigned – becoming only the second Pope since the 1400s to have ever resigned the position. He named himself Pope Emeritus, a position that has retained the style of the current Pope by continuing to wear the papal color of white and has made occasional public appearances alongside his successor, Pope Francis. After realizing the child sex abuse scandal continues to be a global issue, Pope Francis started to make shifts in the crisis responses and image restoration strategies the Church chooses to deploy in response to the child sex-abuse scandal. Pope Francis announced an unprecedented summit meeting, the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, on the topic and authored a letter to the entire Catholic membership. After being silent for several years, Pope Benedict figuratively leaped out of the shadows to offer his competing response to clarify the Catholic stance on the issue. One aim of this study is to shed new light into the unique situational constraints faced by the Catholic Church during the time around the historical Vatican sexual abuse summit within their crisis response(s).

Many have described the Catholic Church’s child sex abuse scandal as “the greatest public relations crisis an American religious institution has ever weathered” (Maier, 2005, p. 219) and “the most damaging crisis in American religious history” (Maier & Crist, 2017, p. 164). It is important for both scholars and practitioners to

examine the crisis response and image restoration strategies the Church employed for two reasons. First, examining the Catholic Church's image restoration strategies will inform and increase our understanding of how religious organizations respond to crisis. Second, examining these image restoration strategies used in times of crisis could enhance the strategies that other organizations choose to more effectively and appropriately respond to future crises.

The ongoing child sex abuse scandal represents an existential organizational identity crisis for the Catholic Church on multiple, interconnected fronts. For one, the child sex abuse scandal continues to be a far reaching, global issue ever since the scandal first exploded in 2002. Despite the Church's efforts to stigmatize the scandal as a Western issue, or a problem only evident in the United States, abuses have been perpetrated globally. A German Catholic Church report released in September 2018 concluded that "least 3,677 people were abused by clergy between 1946 and 2014" (Winfield, 2019, para. 19). The report found that one in every six cases involved rape, with more than half of the victims under the age of 13 and boys. Winfield in 2019 also found that investigations in Ireland produced four massive reports since 2005 exposing the botched record for dealing with predatory clergy:

The reports have detailed how tens of thousands of children suffered wide-ranging abuses in church-run workhouse-style institutions, how Irish bishops shuttled known pedophiles throughout Ireland and to unwitting parishes in the U.S. and Australia, and how Dublin bishops didn't tell police of any crimes until forced by the weight of lawsuits in the mid-1990s. (para. 23)

In Australia, a landmark study found that "4,444 people were abused at more than 1,000 Catholic institutions between 1980 and 2015" and that investigation by the Royal Commission found that "7 percent of Catholic priests in Australia between 1950 and

2010 had been accused of sexually abusing children” (Winfield, 2019, para. 11). Even the Vatican, despite its small population, has recently had two priests brought to justice for abuses (para. 34).

Second, beyond the pervasive abuse itself, the scandal was intensified by the discovery of rampant clerical cover up within the Church’s walls. For example, one investigation into the diocese of Cloyde found that suspected clergy were still being shielded from the law until 2008, several years after the Irish church enacted policy that required mandatory reporting to police. This policy was eventually rejected by the Vatican with claims that the policy undermined canon law. This rejection by the Vatican, coupled with an unwillingness to cooperate in an Irish-led investigation eventually earned the Vatican the reputation of being guilty of encouraging the “culture of cover-up” within the Church (Winfield, 2019, para. 25). Even when confessions are made, it has been hard for the Church to accept the fact that abuses occurred. As in the case of France’s Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, who alongside five other clergy were sent to trial for covering up abuses at the hand of Rev. Bernard Preynat, who has confessed in letters to his superiors and parents of victims that he abused young scouts. Barbarin has admitted to mistakes but denies covering up any abuses (Winfield, 2019, para. 17-18). Even further concerning, in June 2018, Cardinal Thomas McCarrick, one of many clergy who were involved in drafting the 2002 Catholic policy against child sex abuse, was accused of molesting at least two minors as well as adult seminarians (para. 31). In early 2019, McCarrick became the first cardinal to be defrocked, or thrown out of the Church for sexual abuse, the harshest punishment the church can impose (PBS News Hour, 2019a, para. 1).

Third, the financial impact of the scandal has added to the rippling repercussions for the Church. A 2004 John Jay report disclosed that by that time the Catholic Church in the United States had paid out, \$472 million on sex abuse claims and an estimated \$1.8 billion paid in the period since (Allen, 2019, para. 6). Considering that the United States has since extended the statute of limitations on crimes of this nature, the “deluge of suits could surpass anything the nation’s clergy sexual abuse crisis has seen before, with potentially more than 5,000 new cases and payouts topping \$4 billion” (PBS News Hour, 2019b, para. 3). In addition to the monetary payment made to victims, there is no calculation on the number of financial opportunities lost in light of the scandal. Closed institutions as well as some that were never opened and programs and ministries that were cut back or never began, represent significant financial losses (Allen, 2019, para. 9). Donations and giving has sharply declined. A recent Pew Research Center study that found about one-fourth of U.S. Catholics have decreased donations to the Church because of the scandals” (Crary, 2019, para. 14).

Fourth, and perhaps most calamitous, for parishioners and Catholic church members who are not part of the clergy, the perpetual nature of the scandal is forcing a re-examination and questioning of their faith. A full “thirty-seven percent” of respondents in a recent Gallup poll indicated that the “news of the abuse has led them to question whether they would remain in the Church” (Jones, 2019, para. 1). That number is up twenty-two percent from 2002, when the *Boston Globe* first reported the scandal and its attempted cover-up by high-ranking members of the Church. At the same time, “the accusations have coincided with a drop in the share of U.S. Catholics who approve of the way the pope is handling the abuse crisis”, with only “three-in-ten American Catholics

(31%)” reporting that the Pope is “doing a “good” (18%) or “excellent” (13%) job of addressing the sex abuse scandal” (Lipka & Masci, 2018, para. 2). Given these reports, it is no surprise that the church has seen a trend in fading Catholic identity as members continue to leave the faith: “A Pew survey found that, as of 2015, while 32% of Americans were raised Catholic, just 21% remained so. That drop off is more than twice the rate at which Americans left Protestantism. Church attendance also fell sharply” (Britzky, 2018, para. 5). Entire generations have grown up knowing only of the Catholic Church engulfed within the child-sex abuse scandals, and “the Church’s image among people under 30 has never been worse, meaning the next generation of priests — and parishioners — simply may not be there” (para. 2).

In sum, fading membership, dwindling donations, financial hardship and continuous cover ups on top of the thousands of victims of these horrific abuses all play important parts in making this one of the biggest scandals in church history. The 1.23 billion members of the Catholic Church represent the core constituency of the organization, and needless to say, if vast percentages of those members lose faith, leave the Church, or stop contributing money to the Church, the ramifications for the organization would be catastrophic.

For these reasons, the Catholic Church serves as a quintessential case study of existential organizational crisis and a unique opportunity to examine how organizations attempt to restore their image amidst such “wicked cris[es]” (Maier & Crist, 2017). In addition to contributing to the scholarly literature on organizational crisis communication, this case study extends both theoretical and pragmatic resources to help religious organizations who face crises.

From the standpoint of organizational crisis communication, this study extends what we know as a discipline about the Catholic Church, its organizational response to the child sex abuse scandal and how it handles threats to organizational identity. While many scholars have written about this topic, we have entered a new era in terms of the Church's evolving response to the ongoing crisis, one that warrants new investigation and research. Though the pervasive and ongoing nature of the crisis has become clear to all interested publics, the official response from the Church, until recently, had remained locked in a short-term, 'triage' approach to crisis communication that was not commensurate with the situation. The Church's response to every new allegation and emerging story was simply to: "Acknowledge the wrongdoing. Remove the offenders and those who covered up their actions. Settle the lawsuits" (Green, 2019, para. 21). Perhaps this is not altogether surprising given that the Catholic hierarchy was locked into a quick-solution, cover-up mindset, and would have never willingly confessed or confronted the abuse allegations; it took outside spotlighting to get the Catholic leadership to even begin the process of admitting that there might be a problem (Donadio, 2019, np).

The Catholic Church is now operating under a very unique landscape, one where there are two Popes— a situation that hasn't occurred in over 600 years. The entire membership of the church, parishioners and clergy, have never had to contend with this rare and confusing situation. The timeframe of this study encompasses responses of both Popes which illustrates a competing leadership front for the Church. Thus, this study sheds light on the impact that competing organizational leadership messages have on the effectiveness of image restoration strategies.

### *Literature Review*

It is necessary to provide a brief overview of the relevant research that exists at the intersection of organizational crisis communication and the ongoing child sex abuse scandal that has engulfed the Catholic Church. Therefore, I offer a review of previous studies of the Catholic Church and crisis, in addition to the literature on organizational image repair. This study applies the theoretical lens of crisis and image restoration theories.

#### *Failures of Past Catholic Crisis Communication*

Several scholars have tackled the specific topic of Catholic image repair and a brief overview of this literature is necessary to help serve as a theoretical foundation and framework for the project, and to place it in its disciplinary and historical context. It is also important to examine past crises highlighting where the Church has failed to address the public and audience appropriately and how important addressing this audience is to effective crisis communication strategies that in-turn shape organizational identity.

*Failure to listen and respond to key public audiences.* C.T. Maier had an unique perspective on the child abuse scandal as he was serving as a public relations representative for one of the many dioceses in the Boston area when the news of the scandal first broke in 2002. The diocese in and around Boston eventually proved to be the epicenter of the crisis, with 90 priests in that vicinity accused of assault (Maier, 2005, p. 219).

Maier employed the theory of the public sphere to analyze the organizational response from the church and argued that the crisis did indeed activate many critical

publics, most of whom in opposition to the way the Catholic Church handled the scandal. However, the discourses surrounding the crisis fell short of an ideal version of the public sphere because it did not engender rational deliberation within the Church itself. Rather, according to Maier, “The bishops listened to victims and critics, but they did not respond to their critical publics directly, arguing instead with each other and maintaining a firm grip over the agenda” (p. 221).

Maier also employed Hauser’s theory of vernacular voice to argue that organizations in crisis, like the Catholic Church, ought to re-conceptualize how they view hostile publics. He alludes that when organizations listen, respect and work with their audiences, recognizing the power they exercise, then “leaders can ask publics to respect, understand, and cooperate with them in return. Hauser’s model suggests that leaders should want to hear the publics they have so long ignored or sought to control” (p. 223). Maier ultimately concluded that rather than having its leadership attempt to control the agenda and trajectory of the crisis, the leaders of the Catholic Church should have been more open, responsive, and attentive to the multiple critical publics who mobilized in opposition once the scandal entered the public sphere.

Another author who recognizes the need to focus on the audience was James Kauffman (2008). He examined Archbishop Cardinal Bernard Law’s image restoration strategies in his press conference to respond to the Boston Globe’s 2002 sexual abuse charges. Kauffman (2008) employed the theory of image restoration to assess the effectiveness of Law’s response and found that despite Law’s utilization of many of the image restoration theory’s strategies, Law failed to win over the audience he addressed, even despite receiving positive feedback from his initial accuser. Law could not

overcome the turbulent *history* he had with his audience, which resulted in his audience rejecting his apology.

*Failure to choose the right words.* Garcia (2009) also argues that that the Catholic Church needed to do a more effective job of translating pastoral, official-sounding pronouncements from on-high into more every day, layperson language that “profane” audiences could easily consume and comprehend (p.72). According to Garcia, “the Catholic hierarchy does not see the need to respond to public opinion; it feels obligated to offer explanations only to Christ” (p.71). Given this argument, it is not surprising that the official responses generated by the leadership of the Church fell short of striking a resonant chord with the mass public audience. It is this repeated failure to connect with constituent and public audiences that has haunted the Catholic handling of the issue from the outset—something that continues to eat away at their organizational identity and in effect, the identities of its members.

*Overreliance on blame-shifting.* One of the first moves by the Catholic Church in the wake of a wave of child sexual abuse allegations, was to contract with an external review organization (John Jay College) to conduct research on both the nature and the scope of the crisis. The move to “investigate” is a classic strategic apologia move, often engaged in by organizations who are in crisis. The “investigation” approach buys time for the organization, and serves a legitimate purpose if the organization is, in fact, lacking knowledge about the extent of a given crisis (Willems, 2013, p. 193). Willems argued that the investigative endeavors in the ‘John Jay Report’ allow the organization to re-frame individual social actions/choices, based on personal desire, to actions and choices

dictated by changes in society and culture. Willems explains that the research team's approach was to analyze rates and incidences of abuse and then use them to explain that it was societal changes during this time that created an atmosphere that caused the occurrence of abuse rather than individual motives.

Willems (2013) argued that one of the issues facing the Catholic Church in its organizational crisis response was the tendency of the public to conceptualize "the Church" as a monolithic entity, capable of intent, motive, etc. In truth, "the Church" (like large corporations or other organizations) is made up of people with individual agency. When the Catholic Church solicited the John Jay Report(s), it was searching for a way to shift blame from "the Church" to the individuals who make up that organization. As a result of the approach to crisis, the Catholic Church further distanced itself from the crisis by shifting blame away from individual leaders and individual motives and toward societal ills and changes.

In yet another example to highlight even further blame shifting of the Church as well as argue that these strategies prevented the Church from employing other strategies, like mortification, David Cisneros argued in 2007 that media attention formed a homosexual panic that blamed gay men by focusing debate on the role of homosexuals in the Church. Once again, rather than tackle the issues head-on, the Church chose to shift blame to another party.

The central constructs of image restoration theory and organizational crisis communication provide scholarly insight into the ways in which the Catholic Church maintains its organizational identity with its members.

### *Central Ideas of Organizational Crisis Communication*

Reputation is an intangible, symbolic and priceless commodity. While it is not able to be measured in weight, its mismanagement can damage an organization.

*Reputation, image and emotion.* Reputation and image are key to organizational survival. Positive reputations bring a wealth of benefits to entities, including vitality, a growing customer base, continued financial success and many others. Inversely, bad reputations can wreak havoc on an organization; including membership lost, revenue decreases, loss of faith in the mission of the organization and so on. Crisis happens to all organizations, be it small or large, and mismanagement can sully an organization with a bad reputation among customers, members and investors, thus endangering its own existence. Important to remember, is that reputation and image are major factors in how potential members choose one organization over another (Van de Meer & Verhoeven 2014, p. 527). Pace, Fediuk, and Botero (2010) contend that “an important factor for the success of an organization is how stakeholders perceive and evaluate its reputation” (p. 410). Seemingly, it is of importance to examine the strategies organizations use when addressing their audiences in light of crisis. Tkalac Verčič (2019) also argues that good reputations are vital to an organization’s success and that reputation is becoming one and the same with identity and image, Positive reputations form intangible assets. There is no “definitive definition” of reputation, and the concept still lacks an agreed theoretical basis. Reputation has been used synonymously with identity, image, prestige, goodwill, esteem, and standing” (p.30). Given that the Catholic Church is a large organization, these same tenants would apply when examining the Church’s responses to crisis and maintaining its viability as a strong organization.

Van de Meer and Verhoeven (2014) contend that “corporate reputation is driven by the emotions one experiences toward an organization” (p. 527). Crises amplify and have the potential to shift emotions felt toward organizations and corporations. Further, “corporate reputations are based on information about the organization available to the stakeholder,” and in this social media environment, a large amount of information comes from the media (p. 527).

In times of crisis, communication strategies are aimed at informing key stakeholders and minimizing damage to reputation and image. Van de Meer and Verhoeven (2014) argue that “crisis response strategies can be applied to steer the sensemaking and opinions of stakeholders and repair corporate image or prevent reputational damage” (p. 527). The authors contend that whether intentional or not, emotion can be used to influence how an organization is seen by its audience. Further, emotional expression can be verbal or nonverbal through gestures, and this emotional expression fulfills a social purpose and, thus, influences our relationships with both individuals and organizations: “Emotions are also a form of communication; emotions reveal information about the sender (i.e. the organization). This revealed information includes the feelings of the sender, motives or intentions of the sender, and the sender’s concern for the wellbeing of the public” (p. 528). The scholars explain that this type of communication not only functions as insight into an organization but can also affect how the audience interprets an organization message as well as its credibility. Given the high emotional nature of the crisis faced by the Catholic Church, these elements are central to the Church’s response to this scandal.

Crises tend to create feelings of anger toward an organization, and in instances of more offensive crisis, large portions of members flock away and disassociate with an organization. However, “[s]uch emotions may be altered by an emotional crisis response by an organization” (Van der Meer and Verhoeven 2014, p. 529). Rationally, if an organization were to employ an emotional response strategy to crisis, the authors contend that the communicated message could reduce the anger felt by stakeholders in response to the offense. Van der Meer and Verhoeven found that:

Experimental research indicated the importance of reducing a recipient’s anger because anger drives (negative) secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions and is negatively related to corporate reputation. By communicating shame and regret, people may feel that their harm is acknowledged by an organization, which may buffer recipients’ feelings of anger. In addition, by communicating shame or regret, an organization may be perceived as more human which enables people to feel more sympathy toward the organization. Sympathy, in turn, may positively affect corporate reputation. (p. 529)

In short, the authors demonstrated that by using mortification, or shame and regret, strategy resulted in a positively affected reputation with their audiences. “The display of these emotions by spokespersons affects the way the public makes sense of the role of the organization in the crisis” (p. 533).

*Credibility and accepting responsibility.* Credibility with one’s target audience(s) and positive image are essential to managing and maintaining an organization’s identity and membership or external constituencies. Similar to the spectrum of reputation, having credibility with one’s members fosters customer or member loyalty and continued success, whereas organizations who are not credible find themselves without member support and run the risk of withering away. Benoit (1997) argues:

Image is essential to organizations (i.e., corporations, government bodies, non-profit groups) as well as individuals. Even if we are moving away from a notion of image as a single impression shared by an audience, image is still a central concept to the field of public relations. (para. 1)

The work of Pace et al. (2010) sheds light on the nature of organizational mistakes or violations of norms which he refers to as transgressions. Transgressions are usually the source of crisis and threat to an organization's reputation. Pace and colleagues explain that "Transgressions are crisis events in which stakeholders perceive that the organization has deliberately engaged in some wrongdoing, violating important stakeholder values" (p. 411). Transgressions are willful offenses, like in the case of the Catholic Church, covering up corruption or misconduct. While it may seem unlikely, there are methods for recovering from even the most horrific of transgressions. Scholars suggest that accepting responsibility for the misconduct plays a huge role in the recovery of the organization's reputation and credibility. Pace et al. (2010) found that "Research in crisis communication suggests that the best way for an organization to respond after a transgression is to accept responsibility for the incident" (p. 411). In light of transgressions, they suggest the following:

When an organization commits a transgression, stakeholders expect the organization to offer an account of its actions. An account is a statement used to address unanticipated or untoward behavior. Organizations use accounts to address their stakeholders and to attempt to repair or minimize the damage to their reputation caused by the crisis (p. 412).

Image restoration theory is one method we can use to understand the messages that are employed to respond to an organization's image crisis. Benoit (1997) argues that in order to understand image repair strategies, one must first understand the context of crisis. Each crisis instance must contain two parts or elements; first, the offender is held liable for the occurrence and second, the incident is considered offensive. Logically, if

the organization or entity wasn't responsible for the crisis, the incident would have no bearing on its image or credibility. However, Benoit argues that perception is just as, and maybe more, important as reality:

Second, for both conditions, perceptions are more important than reality. The important point is not whether the business in fact is responsible for the offensive act, but whether the firm is thought to be responsible for it by the relevant audience. Of course, if the firm is not really to blame for the offensive act, this can be an important component of its response. As long as the audience thinks the firm at fault, the image is at risk. (para. 5)

Similarities can be drawn within the second element, whether the incident is seen as offensive. It is not a question of whether the crisis was indeed offensive, but rather whether the salient audience perceives the wrongdoing as offensive in nature. It becomes very apparent that the relevant audience or audiences play a key role in effectiveness of the organization's crisis communication strategy and the effect the message has on the organization's reputation. Other scholars like Van de Meer and Verhoeven (2014) argue that "corporate reputation is driven by the emotions one experiences toward an organization. In addition, reputations are driven by the beliefs one holds about an organization" (p. 527). One can easily see how this is relevant in the context of the Catholic Church's image crisis, in that the Church's reputation is driven by the emotions experienced by the parishioners. In order to succeed at repairing the Church's image, the leadership or the Pope will need to take in account his salient audiences, parishioners, clergy, as well as the media, and decrease any negative emotions that might be felt by these audiences toward the Church.

Lee (2004) found that "the more severe the crisis, the more personal involvement/relevance is aroused in the audience, which, in turn, leads to more attribution of responsibility to the organization" (p. 605). Therefore, it is safe to assume

that the more horrendous the transgression, the harder the organization will need to work in order to repair its image and re-legitimize itself in order to overcome the crisis and regain audience and member trust. Given the awful nature of the Catholic Church's crisis, these insights provided by Lee will be relevant when examining the Church's crisis response. Have they acknowledged the horrific nature of the abuse and how are responding to those acts? Lee continues to advise that "high crisis severity may trigger negative emotional reactions as well as sending a danger signal to the observing consumers of the possible risks involved in being a customer of the offending organization" (p. 605). Again, severity of the transgression challenges the efforts of the organization in attempting to repair its image and reputation, as well as challenges how and if the organization will be seen as legitimate to its current members as well as future members.

Organizations, including religious entities, are becoming aware that it is not only the crisis that needs attention but also the varied audiences need consideration when addressing crisis. In 1998, televangelist Jimmy Swaggart was suspended and ultimately removed from his duties because he was implicated in a sex scandal involving a prostitute, and then three years later he was again implicated in another scandal involving a prostitute. During the campaign to reclaim his legitimacy among his church and followers, Swaggart successfully employed mortification as one strategy as he knew his followers would be more concerned with whether or not he was remorseful than if he was actually guilty (Legg, 2009, p. 248). Swaggart knew his audience would want him to express remorse and ask for forgiveness, and thus effectively deployed a mortification strategy when everyone was watching.

*Image restoration theory.* Image restoration theory functions differently than other crisis communication strategies that focus on the types or kinds of crisis. Image restoration theory focuses on the message options available to an offending organization (Benoit 1997, para. 8). According to Coombs et al (2010), “Benoit extends corporate apologia through his work with image restoration theory or image repair theory as it is now called. Benoit argues that corporations have reputations (images) that are valuable to the corporation and warrant protection when threatened” (p. 340). Benoit (1997) suggests that there are five broad categories of image repair strategies available for utilization. First, *denial* can take two variations simple refutation of the claim as false and blame shifting, diverting attention to another act as responsible for the transgression. The second strategy is *evasion of responsibility*, which can split into four variables: provocation (that the company was only responding to another offensive act), defeasibility (the company didn’t have enough information to act appropriately), accident (that the transgression was simply a mishap and not of normal occurrence) and good intentions (that the transgression was performed with good intent). A third strategy is to *reduce offensiveness*. There are six versions of this strategy: bolstering (emphasizing the positive traits), minimization (reducing the offensiveness of the transgression), differentiation (distancing this transgression from another more offensive one), transcendence (places the transgression in a more positive context), attack accuser (negate the credibility of the victim) and compensation (reimburse victims). *Corrective action* is the fourth image repair strategy in which the company promises to fix the problem and prevent the transgression from happening in the future (p.179-181).

Finally, *mortification* is the fifth image repair strategy that aims to accept responsibility for transgressions. Mortification involves asking forgiveness in an attempt to restore one's image (Benoit, 1997, p. 181). Often, this strategy involves apologizing for misconduct and asking understanding and compassion for these missteps. This is usually where an organization will direct its crisis communication rhetoric to its most salient audiences. Mortification is a central strategy that is pervasive in both of the texts chosen for this study. Given the deployment of this strategy by the Pope, it is relevant that we review how mortification can be used to restore an organization's image. While there may be many different audiences affected by the transgression, it is ever important for organizations to identify and prioritize the audience for its messages. According to Benoit (1997), identifying the prominent audiences is paramount and one of the key elements of persuasion. If there is more than one priority constituent group to address in an organization's response messages to the crisis, the organization must prioritize these audiences, pacifying or appeasing the most significant one first, then dedicating time to the second audience as possible (Benoit, 1997, p. 183).

Benoit continues to highlight that it can be "extremely important to report plans to correct and/or prevent recurrence of the problem" (p. 184). While it will be equally important to address the elements of the misconducts, audiences will be reassured if messages contain plans to eliminate the possibility of similar abuses going forward. "A firm commitment to correct the problem – repair damage and/or prevent future problems – can be a very important component of image restoration discourse" (p. 184).

Mortification can be used to reassert legitimacy to an organization after a crisis. Accepting full responsibility and fully apologizing for transgressions is key to

maintaining the legitimacy of the organization. Particularly in cases where the transgressions are horrendous. Making sure an organization is seen as credible and legitimate go hand in hand with restoring one's image. In fact, Hearit (1995) argues that the act of apologizing "is a public response to a social legitimacy crisis, a response that seeks to distance institutional actors from their wrongdoing and reaffirm adherence to key social values" (p. 1). While an apology can seek to accept responsibility and provide reassurance that transgressions will not occur in the future, it also carries significant weight in how an organization's membership or audiences will perceive its effectiveness and to what extent those audiences hold hostility against the organization. Hearit continues to explain that "Corporate social legitimacy theory argues that corporations exist in a state of dependency up on their environments and, hence, can only survive to the extent that they can convince their social environment that their use of exchange power is 'rightful and proper'" (p. 2). It is here that Hearit confirms the importance of audience identifications hence the audience itself holds the key to whether an organization is seen as genuine and authentic.

According to Hearit (1995), "A first criterion that corporations must fulfill to achieve and maintain legitimacy is competence. Competence concerns organizational effectiveness – the ability of a corporation to 'deliver the goods.'" (p. 2). The organization must produce a successful product or deliver a service that meets expectations in the marketplace. In this project, this product is the values of the Catholic Church, and what it means to be a member of the Catholic faith, the service is the ethical adherence to tenants of this faith. The second measure of legitimacy is what Hearit refers to as a social or community sanction. This involves how much animosity an

organization's audiences hold against it for the transgression. The higher the animosity, the less legitimate an organization is seen and vice versa, the less animosity that is perceived, the more an audience will see an organization as legitimate or valid. Therefore, it is logical to assume that legitimacy is the primary motive for crisis communication. Hearit argues that "The re-legitimation of an organization is the primary motivation for a corporate response to a charge of wrongdoing. Such efforts typically required a dual strategy of a positive and a negative rhetoric" (p. 6). The negative rhetoric involves admitting the wrongdoing and asking forgiveness for these transgressions. While it is never an easy task to admit wrongdoing, organizations are required to apply a short-term focus on the negative (the explanation or reference to the misconduct). After doing so, the organization can shift focus to the positive, or the reassurances that opportunities for misconduct to occur in the future have been diminished or eliminated.

Another element in the pursuit for maintaining legitimacy or re-legitimizing an organization is dissociation. By creating distance between the organization and the misconduct, messages that invoke dissociation can reduce the amount of animosity the audience feels toward an organization. "A strategy of redefinition relies heavily on the use of dissociation to diffuse public antipathy toward the corporation and re-legitimate it. Dissociations are arguments that break links; that is, they bifurcate a unitary concept" (Hearit, 1995, p. 6). When organizations can't deny the abuses, it must accept responsibility and begin to create dissociations between the misconduct and the actors within the organization and the organization itself in order to achieve re-legitimization with its membership.

Hearit (1995) contends that “In an individual/group dissociation, a corporation acknowledges that wrongdoing has occurred by some of its employees, but it differentiates those individuals from the rest of the organization” (p.8). Coombs et al. (2010) applauded Hearit’s work on dissociations, highlighting how this work contributed to seeing corporate apologia as a resource or tool for analyzing crisis communication. According to Coombs and colleagues, “The individual/group dissociation argues that it is just a part of the corporation (a few people) that did something wrong and that the actions are not representative of the corporation as a whole” (p. 340).

Once again, we find organizations engaged in a negative/positive rhetoric exchange within its messages to the key audiences. In separating what occurred or creating dissociations, the organization focuses on the negative elements of the transgression itself, diffusing responsibility to “others”, but positively negotiates the path to an offense-free environment, where such crimes can’t be committed in the future by way of corrective action.

The way in which the Catholic Church has chosen to handle and respond to scandal (both past and present) plays a direct part in its identity management and maintenance with its membership, as well as its organization’s culture. It is these sorts of activities, like how well it listens to its publics, the words it chooses to use to respond and blame-shifting — things beyond just “getting the job done” — that constitute organizational culture. As Deetz (1982) noted:

Culture serves both as a description of the organization of activities and meaning in organizations, its structure, and as a description of the activities by which these meaning come to be produced and shared in organizations, its structuration. (p. 132)

Deetz continues to explain how individual perceptions of an organization are not individually crafted and created, but rather come from an initial orientation by that organization, whether that be what the organization does, what the organization says or how the organization responds. Deetz explains that members' perceptions and knowledge come from precedent or organizational background and are institutionalized to the membership through various ways such as talking or organizational positions. He concludes:

From this assumed institutional background activities are coordinated, and new meanings are negotiated. In this sense culture serves as more than a metaphor for organizations but describe the system of meaning inscribed and made manifest in various institutional forms. (p. 134)

It is the discursive power of the Church that gives it power, not the physical walls of the individual church structures. Thus, it is vitally important that we look to the Church's responses and reactions as a way of understanding how, as an organization, it handles and navigates identity threats. Based on this literature, and given the aims of the study, my examination of the speeches and letters will look to uncover and identify the following image repair strategies, and to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the image restoration strategies employed by Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict during the four-month timeframe around the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church?

RQ2: How did the image restoration strategies of Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict differ and/or cohere in the crisis communication surrounding the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church?

RQ3: What effect does dual leadership messages have on the organizational credibility of the Catholic Church with both internal (leadership and clergy) and external audiences (parishioners)?

### *Preview of Chapters*

Chapter Two details the case study methodology and the specific texts chosen for this analysis. Chapter Three examines the image repair strategies used by Pope Francis in the three addresses surrounding the historic Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church. I argue that his use of mortification, corrective action, dissociation, and transcendence strategies represented a symbolic step away from the typical Catholic Church response. I also argue that this combination of strategies, when taken by themselves, should have begun to repair the image of the Church and to decrease member anger at the organization. Chapter Four analyzes the image restoration strategies employed in Pope Benedict's letter authored in response to the Vatican sexual abuse summit and other statements made by Pope Francis during this timeframe. Here, I argue that Benedict's strategic choices represented a symbolic return to the reliance on occlusion, blame shifting and the over application of biblical rhetoric. Finally, Chapter Five compares and contrasts the image repair strategies of Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict and discusses the implications of competing and contradicting image restoration strategies on an organization's internal and external reputation. Recommendations for future research are explored and pragmatic recommendations on how the Church might proceed in future cases are highlighted.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methodology

This study is a comparison of the competing image restoration strategies of current Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict. The timeframe for this study is December 2018 through March 2019. This is a key timeframe for several reasons. First, during this timeframe Pope Francis announced a first-of-its-kind gathering, The Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church. The timeframe of this study includes the months leading up to the Summit, and the meeting itself. Second, the timeframe also includes the letter written by Pope Emeritus Benedict, effectively ending his self-imposed silence and creating a unique situation in which Catholics were torn between the leadership of two Popes.

#### *Importance of this Timeframe*

Before defining the methodology behind exploring the areas of divergence and/or convergence in the image restoration strategies of Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict, it is necessary to once again revisit the historic and symbolic uniqueness of the situation. Only twice in the long history of the ancient Catholic religion has there been, at least arguably, more than one Pope. According to one historian, “there were two popes from 1378 to 1409 and three popes from 1409 until 1417”, and but for these occasions, none since (Emmons, 2019, para 3). The Catholic Church, for hundreds of years, and certainly throughout what is considered “modern” history, has been guided by the voice of one leader. When Pope Benedict resigned from the office but reserved the rights of a

nebulous ‘emeritus’ figure, it created “unprecedented potential for confusion and division in a church hierarchy that has room for only one pope at a time” and fueled fears that Benedict “could turn into a shadow pope who has stepped down but can still exert indirect influence” (Gibson, 2013, para 3-4). While Pope Emeritus Benedict had expressed a desire to “retire to a ‘hidden’ life that would in no way interfere with his successor”, he specifically broke that promise by speaking out on an all-encompassing question of organizational survival that Pope Francis was attempting to manage himself (Thavis, 2013, para 2).

Indeed, the situation in early 2019 brought to a head questions simmering since “Benedict’s resignation, and his choices about his future, have raised the not-insignificant question of how the Catholic Church will deal with the novel situation of having one reigning and one retired pope living side-by-side” (New York Post, 2013, para 18). When Benedict stepped down unexpectedly in 2013, “Catholic theologians, canon lawyers and others warned of the potential confusion in having two popes living side by side in the Vatican, one reigning, the other retired but calling himself “emeritus pope” and still wearing the white cassock of the papacy” (Winfield, 2020, para 1).

Acknowledging the inherent risk of dual papal leadership in the Church, theology professor Hubert Wolf argued that “at the symbolic communication level, it’s a catastrophe; there are two men in white on St. Peter’s square and that is far worse than any ideological arguments” (Pongratz-Lippitt, 2017, para 21). It is with these situational and historical constraints in mind that I will now discuss the findings of the study. Notably, this study will examine the impact of the “new organizational position” within the Catholic Church created by Pope Emeritus Benedict’s resignation and subsequent return

to the public forum, and what impacts it can have on image restoration strategies. Additionally, this approach allows the critic to analyze “observable linguistic practices and the effects of those practices on social relationships and action” (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004, p.155). By examining the image restoration strategies during this unique time of somewhat dual leadership for the Catholic Church, this study allows us to peer into how religious organizations handle shifts in identity and organizational structure, while also attempting to deal with ongoing existential crises. Conceiving of organizations as discursive structures, and studying them as such, also allows scholars to “view an organization as something that is always in the act of ‘becoming’ rather than a discrete entity” (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004, p.155). At this unique moment, the ways in which the Church represents and frames itself is an important factor in maintaining the integrity of the faith organization.

### *Selection of Texts*

This study examined four separate examples of image repair discourse by the two Popes. Three of the texts that I analyzed were speeches or letters from Pope Francis—the letter to the people of God written in December 2018, the opening statement he delivered at the Vatican sexual abuse summit, and the closing statements given by him at the summit meeting, both in February 2019. The fourth text that I examined was the open letter written by Pope Emeritus Benedict in April 2019, which was translated and published for global consumption. These texts are important for two reasons, first, because they all occurred in and around the time of the monumental Summit on Child Sex Abuse. This meeting was the first of its kind for the Catholic Church and definitely signaled a new and serious approach by the Church to address the scandal. Additionally,

these texts are important because they occurred within a unique time for the Catholic organization itself, a time 600 years in the making , a time in which there are figuratively and literally two leaders of a what had for eons survived as a an organization with a single leader. I chose to analyze these addresses, and to focus on the discourse of both Popes specifically, for several reasons. First, the Pope is the leader of the Catholic Church, an organization steeped in hierarchy, and one in which reverence for title is a key tenant of the faith, and functions as a discursive rule that governs adherence to group identity. For Catholics, by rule, the word of the Pope is final, and is believed to be proxy for the word of God. Analyzing the official words of the Popes on this issue, particularly when the target audience of their discourse is (or should be) the members of the faith-organization, is central to the execution of this project. Second, these addresses are unique given their timing (centered around a long overdue Vatican sexual abuse summit), scope (a change in the trajectory of Catholic image restoration strategies), and situation (a unique leadership quandary where two Popes are making potentially contradictory statements regarding the scandal), and thus serve as a window into the ways in which discursive practices shape organizational identity and member adherence to that identity. Indeed, one author confirmed that the Pope’s summit address represented a “critical moment” for the Church and came at a time when “U.S. Catholics trust in the church is plummeting” (Johnson, 2019, np; Burke, 2019b, np).

### *Coding for Image Restoration Strategies*

The following approach was used to code each of the four texts analyzed in this study. Each address was examined paragraph by paragraph and coded for instances of any of the five broad categories of image restoration strategies as defined by Benoit

(1997), which are denial, evasion of responsibility, reduce offensiveness, corrective action and mortification, as well as appearances of any of the underlying variants within those five broad categories of image restoration strategies. Paragraphs were coded and then entire addresses were tallied for the frequency of image restoration strategies. Those strategies were then indicated with examples from the address to highlight the strategy discussed.

### *Justification for Textual Analysis*

Textual analysis is the most appropriate methodological approach in order to dissect or isolate the key crisis communication strategies used by the Catholic Church, specifically the Popes. The actual words of the Pope, the leader of the Catholic Church, are the most suitable starting point for a study of this kind. In this study, I conducted a textual analysis of the organizational crisis communication engaged in by Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict in response to the ongoing child sex-abuse scandal that has befallen the Catholic Church, and the millions of members of this global, religious organization, during the time up to and after the monumental Vatican sexual abuse summit.

The study and examination of organizational discourse, at the meta-level, is a useful way to reveal the discursive structural underpinnings that create the parameters of any organization. Indeed, it is useful to conceive of the ways in which “discourse becomes a building block- the very foundation upon which organizational life is built” (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004, p.132). The words used by Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict in these addresses create reality for both parishioners and clergy. As the spokesperson for the faith, the entire membership will follow suit behind what the Pope

says. The Catholic Church is one of the oldest religions, with some of the more ritualistic ways of demonstrating that faith. It is key to analyze not only the discourse it utilizes but also the way in which it delivers that discourse, as Deetz (1982) explains: “The institutionalization may take place in preferred ways of talking, stories, artifacts, physical arrangement, new organizational positions, and particular ways of doing things” (p. 134).

Organizational discourse analysis is the most useful method for this type of study. First, “discourse analysis aims to demystify situations and perceptions that may be viewed as ‘natural’ but have in effect been discursively constructed over time by groups in power aiming to skew social reality and institutional arrangements to their own advantage” (Heracleous, 2004, p.186). This methodological approach seems appropriate for the unpacking of the strategic language choices of the Pope—the leader of an ancient, hierarchical, religious organization whose concentrated power over the rest of the membership is constantly reinforced throughout all levels of the organization.

Second, discourse analysis, informed by organizational structuration theory, is the best way to analyze the Church’s extensive system of discursive practices; practices which govern and define membership in the faith organization itself. Giddens (1984) defines structuration is a recursive process where the structures (rules and resources available to individuals) shape the systems (or behaviors) that individuals enact (p.2). Brenton (1993) argues that discursive power in organizations is often exercised through “institution of titles, rituals, metaphors, informal rules, and ceremonies, which organization members take for granted without questioning how they serve the interests of those in power” (p. 299). In addition, these titles, rituals and rules become habit and

“orient members’ perceptions and provide meaning for organizational activities and objects” (Deetz, 1982, p.134).

Third, this method is particularly useful for analyzing top-down communications in hierarchical organizations. In this case, analysis of the discourse of the Pope, whose “directive speech acts such as commands or orders may be used to enact power”, will reveal the ways in which power both structures and operates within the Church organization (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 250). For studying the organizational structure of the Catholic religion, textual analysis also gives critics a way to methodologically grapple with the complex, layered system of rules (some written, some unwritten/unspoken), which govern life for members of the faith organization. These rules are used to exercise organizational control over the rank-and-file members of the Church, and they are deployed by those in power to “formulate the structure underlying the apparent surface of organizational life” (Clegg, 1981, p.545). This will be helpful in Chapter Four when we look at the impacts of competing organizational leadership messages.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Pope Francis' Image Restoration Discourse August 2018-February 2019

This chapter examines three texts by Pope Francis, all of which center around the historic Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church held in February 2019. The first text is the Pope's 'Letter to the People of God', written and delivered in late August of 2018 during the lead-up to the Vatican sexual abuse summit. The second text is the Pope's opening statement at the summit meeting, and, finally, the third is Pope Francis's closing remarks at the summit. Indeed, the image restoration discourse of Pope Francis with regard to the child sex abuse scandal in the Church is characterized by many of the strategies outlined by scholars such as Benoit (1997) , and the three texts I examine herein are excellent exemplars of this genre of discourse. Taken together, I argue that in these texts, the beginnings of a change in the image restoration discourse of the Catholic Church take root, departing from the previous "propensity for obfuscation, misdirection and, ultimately, inaction when it comes to child abuse" (Carless, 2018, para 9).

#### *Pope Francis and the 'Letter to the People of God'*

The speech by Pope Francis, addressed to all of the people of God and delivered from the Vatican on August 20, 2018, marked a historic occasion for many reasons, but, most importantly, I argue that this pronouncement marked the beginning of a change in approach for the Catholic Church in terms of how it collectively responded to the ongoing child sex abuse scandal. To that point, the Church had been robustly criticized by multiple audiences for its lack of transparency and openness, for its elusiveness and

outright deception with regard to the scandal. While that criticism was both warranted and continues unabated to the current moment, the image restoration strategies employed by Pope Francis in this speech are of the kind that theoretically should begin to have a galvanizing effect on the tattered organizational legitimacy of the Catholic Church and its spiraling member adherence and attendance. Critics of the letter seemed to miss the central thesis of the Pope's argument when they called for "an apology or some form of repentance from the Pope" (Kirby, 2019, para 15). I argue that possibly for the first time in public, Pope Francis did, in fact, engage in significant mortification, straightforward apology, and acceptance of responsibility.

#### *RQ1 Findings: Mortification*

Pope Francis leaned heavily on mortification strategy as part of his image repair discourse in the Letter to the People of God. First, in an emotional admission of responsibility, the Pope acknowledged: "With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives. We showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them" (Francis, 2018, para 3). Further, clearly acknowledging the cover-up and need for cultural change, Francis argued: "We have delayed in applying these actions and sanctions that are so necessary, yet I am confident that they will help to guarantee a greater culture of care in the present and future" (para 5). Pope Francis also argued:

...though it can be said that most of these cases belong to the past, nonetheless as time goes on we have come to know the pain of many of the victims. We have realized that these wounds never disappear and that they require us forcefully to condemn these atrocities and join forces in uprooting this culture of death; these wounds never go away. (para 2)

This example demonstrated deep mortification, care for the victims, and cognizance of the depth of damage incurred by the abuses of the priests and others who covered up the abuse and occluded investigations and punishment for the guilty.

The Pope also called for fasting (mortification) and personal penance as a way to share in the communal guilt and to galvanize the believers, the Catholic parishioners, toward a future in which the Church truly exercises a zero-tolerance policy toward abuse by its priests (corrective action):

I invite the entire holy faithful People of God to a penitential exercise of prayer and fasting, following the Lord's command. This can awaken our conscience and arouse our solidarity and commitment to a culture of care that says 'never again' to every form of abuse (para 6).

The Pope engaged in discursive strategies to link blame and guilt to the parishioners, the audience, and the perpetrators of child abuse, as well. The Pope used the structures, hierarchy, and presumed member adherence to the rules of the organization in order to bring parishioners together; to achieve stability; to assuage dissent: "every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change called for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does" (para 5). Here, Pope Francis asserted that it's incumbent on the people of the Church to make the sweeping cultural change needed to resolve the crisis: "Consequently, the only way that we have to respond to this evil that has darkened so many lives is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God" (para 8). Additionally, it is important again to highlight the work of Pace et al. (2010) who found that "an important factor for the success of an organization is how stakeholders perceive and evaluate its reputation" (p. 410). The management of the reputation of the

organization is key to gain and maintain stakeholder (in this case, Catholic parishioners) adherence to the group. In light of the contingency leaving the Church in the wake of the scandal, the Pope's discourse aimed to prevent more departures. By positioning rank and file Catholics as implicated in the crisis, he called into question the appropriateness of them directing all the blame toward clergy and leaving in the aftermath. Further, his words beseeched parishioners as essential to resolving the crisis and, therefore, compelled to stay.

Finally, in line with Van de Meer and Verhoeven's (2014) work on power of emotional appeals in organizational crisis, Pope Francis tapped into the fear, guilt, shame, and anger felt by parishioners, and he harnessed their guilt to maintain loyalty to the Church. Additionally, given that audiences closely interpret events through their emotions and constituents' feelings about an issue or situation act as a filter for viewing the organization and their place within it, it is important that Pope Francis also enacted and exemplified the emotions which he sought to transfer onto his audiences (Van de Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). In this address, Pope Francis went to great lengths to articulate the deep sorrow and mortification he felt. Deep mortification, or the portrayal of the organization as both responsible and regretful in the perceptions of the audience, can lead to both decreased anger and greater feelings of member identification with the leadership of the organization. When coupled with mortification strategies which entail accepting responsibility and asking forgiveness by the leaders as transgressors, the use of corrective action strategies may be particularly effective for image restoration (Benoit, 1997). The use and function of this strategy will be discussed next.

*RQ1: Findings: Corrective Action*

Benoit's call for effective leaders to continually outline an organization's plans to "repair damage and/or prevent future problems" (p. 184) is exemplified by Pope Francis with:

Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated. The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.

Pope Francis also advocated a move away from "clericalism" as part of the corrective action strategy employed in the Letter to the People of God. Clericalism, or the tendency within a religious organization to symbolically draw hierarchical distinctions between the leaders and the rank-and-file followers, is at the ideological center of the scandal, and the response to it. One of the central criticisms of the Church's response to the child sex abuse scandal was its tendency to adopt this type of "circle the wagons" approach in which priests and other accused members of the clergy acted to protect each other, cover-up or minimize allegations, and generally respond as if they were "above" such transgressions. In doing so, "the consequent demotion of the spiritual dignity of the faithful and a chilling of social relations between clergy and people are all too clear among some church leaders" (Philibert, 2019, para 5). The Pope's warnings against clericalism function as a way to reduce anger toward the priests. That is, by arguing that priests were "fallible" just like anyone else, the Pope undercut parishioners' anger by attempting to make them feel the same shame and guilt ostensibly felt by the clerical perpetrators. As Van de Meer and Verhoeven (2014) argued, expressions of shame or regret help to humanize perpetrators and to foster forgiveness for organizational

transgressions. Additionally, the Pope argued that part of the Church's response to the scandal will be to decrease its historical and traditional reliance on clericalism and to end its deference to high-level leaders based on their title. These statements carry great rhetorical power given that the entire symbolic structure of the Catholic Church has been based upon deference to authority, ultimately to the Pope, whose word is believed to come directly from God. Here, Francis equated the abuse scandal with the drift toward clericalism and strongly renounced its practice, arguing that its elimination is an essential corrective action needed to prevent future transgressions: "Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves, or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say 'no' to abuse is to say an emphatic 'no' to all forms of clericalism" (Francis, 2018, para 7).

*Pope Francis Opening Statement at the Summit*

The opening remarks by Pope Francis at the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, delivered on February 21, 2019 are additionally important to analyze from an organizational image repair perspective given that they were delivered at the "historic summit, attended by 180 Bishops and Cardinals" (Hansen 2019, para 6). I argue that the Pope's foregrounding of the re-commitment to candidness and transparency imbued the entire Summit with a sense that the Church's leadership was finally serious about taking genuine corrective action to grapple with the issue. Early in the speech, Pope Francis directly referred to two target audiences of the Summit speech. By stating that "the People of God look to us" for guidance through the scandal, he confirmed that the speech is not only directed toward the immediate audience, clergymen and leaders gathered for

the Summit, but also to the parishioners, the believers, the church members who look to the Pope for leadership (Pentin, 2019, para 1). This act of responding directly to specific publics enhances the organization's credibility (Kauffman, 2008; Maier, 2005).

In the opening sentences, the Pope noted: "So we begin this process armed with faith and a great spirit of parrhesia, courage, and concreteness" (Pentin, 2019, para 1). This strategy is aimed directly at the immediate audience: the priests, leaders, and other members of the clergy who had heretofore been silent and evasive on the issue. Sometimes, in organizations, the discursive practice is defined and characterized by what is *not* said. While the layers of discursive practice, ritual, rules, scripture, and metaphor are deep and complex within the Catholic Church organization, it is also very much an organizational culture characterized by silence on certain issues such as homosexuality, reproductive rights, and of course, the issue of child sex abuse at the hands of the clergy. The use of this strategy also functioned to send a signal to the parishioners of the Church that silence and secrecy on this issue can no longer be tolerated, and that the culture of obfuscation on this topic must be abandoned, no matter how offended one's sensibilities become when bearing witness to the graphic descriptions of abuse that have been reported.

Also early in the opening statement, Pope Francis thanked the Committee members and the various other members of the clergy who were apparently "working on" solving the issue, a strategy that reinforced the hierarchy but also functions to "embed the stakeholders in the organizational community" as a way of creating "cognitive elaboration of an organizational social identity" (Scott & Lane, 2000, p.50). That is, when the Pope specifically thanked "the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors,

the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the members of the Organizing Committee for their outstanding and dedicated work” (Pentin, 2019, para 3), he ingratiated himself to that immediate audience and praises them as a way to maintain their adherence to the organizational hierarchy. It is advantageous for these clergymen, who have now been publicly thanked by the most powerful leader in the Catholic Church, to remain embedded in the Church hierarchy rather than to criticize it. This is an example of one way in which the faith organization has maintained control and power over its membership through discursive communication practices such as “institution of titles” as Brenton (1993) observed. While this may seem contradictory to his earlier position where he is breaking down the hierarchy of the Church with his words, this sub-strategy of reinforcing the hierarchy through words of praise and thanks, is working to embed the clergy – who were the target audience for this strategy – into adhering to his new organizational hierarchy.

It is also important to consider what image repair strategies did not appear in the opening statement of the summit address. Curiously, given that the Pope’s immediate audience was comprised of “ecclesiastics” and clergymen, the opening statement of the Summit address included no specific references to scripture. Pope Francis implored the audience to “listen to the Holy Spirit,” but, otherwise, scriptural references were notably absent. Reference to scripture is often used in these instances to control, appeal to, and gain adherence to organizational identity among the membership. Brenton (1993) found:

...power is gained when a dominant group is able to establish their own interpretive pattern and mode of rationality within an organization. This is often done through institution of titles, rituals, metaphors, informal rules, and ceremonies, which organization members take for granted without questioning how they serve the interests of those in power. (p. 229)

Given that the immediate audience is comprised of Church leaders who are presumed to automatically adhere to the religious identity of the organization, the omission of scripture is logical. However, given that the Pope himself has already identified the parishioners, the “believers” as a second audience of the speech, the omission is interesting, in that this signals a change in the Church’s past image restoration strategies. Rather than attempt to gain power through the use of metaphors from scripture, the Pope had hoped to gain that power from his use of candidness and transparency. Nevertheless, despite the lack of scripture, the references to “the Holy Spirit” subconsciously reified the power of the Pope in the audience’s mind in a similar way in which Brenton (1993) and Deetz (1982) observed how organizations utilize rituals, titles and ceremonies to create organizational culture and legitimize authority.

*RQ1: Findings: Mortification, Corrective Action, and Transcendence*

The Pope’s address began with the use of two traditional organizational crisis communication approaches: mortification and corrective action. Pope Francis accesses the mortification strategy by acknowledging “the weight of the pastoral and ecclesial responsibility” that surrounds the summit gathering. Mortification strategies entail asking for forgiveness, and/or accepting responsibility for wrongdoing. He also directly identified “the scourge of sexual abuse perpetrated by ecclesiastics to the great harm of minors” as the reason for the summit. The practice of confession, accepting responsibility for one’s sins, is a key tenant of the Catholic faith and also functions as one of those structuring discursive practices that fundamentally support the faith organization. Mortification, in this instance, also functions strategically as requisite for influencing parishioner’s decisions to either adhere to the organization or to leave the Church. The

failure of the Catholic leadership to admit their failings in the sex abuse crisis is a key factor in parishioners leaving the Church. The Pope had no choice but to finally accept responsibility.

Pope Francis also deployed the corrective action strategy and acknowledged directly that the members of the faith organization expected him to do so: “The holy People of God looks to us, and expects from us not simple and predictable condemnations, but concrete and effective measures to be undertaken” (Pentin, 2019, para 1). He did not directly reference those concrete corrective actions in the speech, but he did distribute a 21-point list of suggested rules that should be followed in the event of reported case of sexual abuse by a member of the clergy. For the corrective action strategy to be more effective, specific types of corrective action and preventative measures should have been more directly and explicitly addressed in the speech itself

At the conclusion of the speech, Pope Francis engaged in the classic use of the transcendence strategy, one defined by Benoit (1997) as an attempt to move the audience beyond the immediate crisis at hand and direct their attention to a time after the crisis when the organization has “learned from it,” “moved on,” or become “better” for having gone through the crisis. The Pope asked, “the Holy Spirit to sustain us throughout these days, and to help us turn this evil into an opportunity for awareness and purification” (Pentin, 2019, para 4). When coupled with deep mortification and corrective action strategies, the transcendence strategy is often an effective image repair strategy. Here, the Pope takes care not to be perceived as attempting to silence voices or quickly move past the abuse scandal and skip ahead to corrective measures. Pope Francis succeeded at

balancing this scenario by attempting to usher the audience not to forget transgressions but to focus on how we can learn from them.

*Pope Francis: Closing Speech at the Summit*

Arguments made in the final speech examined here, the closing remarks by Pope Francis at the Summit, were foreshadowed in both the Letter to the People of God and in the opening statements at the event. Mortification and corrective action strategies were recurrent, and Pope Francis also outlined specific enforcement mechanisms and guidelines to be followed by the clergy at the first report of any new case of sexual abuse. The first eight hundred words of the speech, a lengthy, extended argument that occupied the first quarter of the address, are dedicated to an exploration of the problem of child sexual abuse from a historical, cultural, and social standpoint. Pope Francis argued that the sexual abuse of children dated back to the practice of child sacrifice in ancient pagan religions, has been quietly tolerated by society for hundreds of years, and is now a widespread, quasi-sanctioned practice in contemporary society. Here, Francis also highlighted the influence of the internet and pornography as contributing factors to the wider problem of the abuse of minors in society. Francis (2019b) remarked:

We are thus facing a universal problem, tragically present almost everywhere and affecting everyone. Yet we need to be clear, that while gravely affecting our societies as a whole, this evil is in no way less monstrous when it takes place within the Church. (para 12)

However, rather than deploy this line of argument as blame-shifting, Pope Francis employed it as an entry point into Church's moves toward corrective action.

*RQ1 Findings: Corrective Action and Transcendence*

Pope Francis argued that the scourge of pedophilia, though terrible in society at large, was even worse when it appeared in the Church---an institution once thought immune to failures of moral conscience. This public cognizance by the Pope also allowed him to further outline the Church's corrective action approach, which included mortification ("no explanations will suffice"), and corrective actions which entailed punishment of offenders ("disciplinary measures") up to and including law enforcement ("civil processes"):

The brutality of this worldwide phenomenon becomes all the more grave and scandalous in the Church, for it is utterly incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility. Consecrated persons, chosen by God to guide souls to salvation, let themselves be dominated by their human frailty or sickness and thus become tools of Satan. In abuse, we see the hand of the evil that does not spare even the innocence of children. No explanations suffice for these abuses involving children. We need to recognize with humility and courage that we stand face to face with the mystery of evil, which strikes most violently against the most vulnerable, for they are an image of Jesus. For this reason, the Church has now become increasingly aware of the need not only to curb the gravest cases of abuse by disciplinary measures and civil and canonical processes, but also to decisively confront the phenomenon both inside and outside the Church. She feels called to combat this evil that strikes at the very heart of her mission, which is to preach the Gospel to the little ones and to protect them from ravenous wolves.(Francis, 2019b, para 8).

It is important to note the Pope's bold shift in re-casting the entire mission of the Church, and its members/followers, to be centered upon protection of children and vulnerable adults from predators within the Church. Casting this new mission as 'a priori' helps to demonstrate the depth at which the Church is actually engaging in corrective action to atone for a past organizational transgression.

One specific, recurrent demand from both survivors of abuse at the hands of the clergy and external audiences skeptical of the Church's response, was the insistence that

the Pope endorse a “zero tolerance” policy with regard to new instances of abuse. One critic argued that “if the summit ends and the Pope doesn’t implement a zero-tolerance policy,” the ongoing investigations by law enforcement and the global media scrutiny will only “accelerate” (CBS, 2019, para 12). In a specific answer to victims’ advocates who were desperate for the Pope to outline a new approach, and in a clear example of a commitment to corrective action and a zero tolerance stance, Pope Francis (2019b) argued that:

Here again I would state clearly: if in the Church there should emerge even a single case of abuse – which already in itself represents an atrocity – that case will be faced with the utmost seriousness. Brothers and Sisters: in people’s justified anger, the Church sees the reflection of the wrath of God, betrayed and insulted by these deceitful consecrated persons. The echo of the silent cry of the little ones who, instead of finding in them fathers and spiritual guides encountered tormentors, will shake hearts dulled by hypocrisy and by power. It is our duty to pay close heed to this silent, choked cry. (para 9)

Pope Francis makes it clear that we must listen to our victims and take action to eradicate these abuses. In another example of both corrective action and mortification, Pope Francis argued that the Church would take every practical and judicial measure available, but also take the path of self-accusation and penance as a symbol of self-reflexivity and mortification:

Just as we must take every practical measure that common sense, the sciences and society offer us, neither must we lose sight of this reality; we need to take up the spiritual means that the Lord himself teaches us: humiliation, self-accusation, prayer and penance. This is the only way to overcome the spirit of evil. It is how Jesus himself overcame it. The Church’s aim will thus be to hear, watch over, protect and care for abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are. (para 14 and 15)

This move toward self-accusation is further exemplified here, the opposite of blame-shifting, which had been a stock image repair strategy for the Church in the past:

The holy fear of God leads us to accuse ourselves – as individuals and as an institution – and to make up for our failures. Self-accusation is the beginning of wisdom and bound to the holy fear of God: learning how to accuse ourselves, as individuals, as institutions, as a society. For we must not fall into the trap of blaming others, which is a step towards the “alibi” that separates us from reality. (para 21)

In yet another important symbolic move, Pope Francis deployed a specific corrective action strategy designed to refute and preempt the standard allegation that the Church was only interested in protecting its own reputation at the expense of the victims. Here, Francis pledged to pursue every means necessary to protect the little ones; the *victims* and specifically not the Church:

The primary goal of every measure must be to protect the little ones and prevent them from falling victim to any form of psychological and physical abuse. Consequently, a change of mentality is needed to combat a defensive and reactive approach to protecting the institution and to pursue, wholeheartedly and decisively, the good of the community by giving priority to the victims of abuse in every sense. (para 19)

As further support of the Church’s new position, Pope Francis explicitly forbid cover-ups and pledged deeper commitment to bringing priestly perpetrators to justice, when he argued that “the Church will spare no effort to do all that is necessary to bring to justice whosoever has committed such crimes. The Church will never seek to hush up or not take seriously any case” (para 20).

In line with this new commitment to serious abuse prevention and enforcement efforts, Pope Francis argued that, moving forward, the Church would follow codified *rules*, not just *suggestions*, which led to cover-ups of abuse in the past. Here, Pope Francis indicated that the effort would begin at the highest levels, with the Bishops, who would be required to follow systematized rules when dealing with reports of new or existing allegations:

In other words, reaffirming the need for bishops to be united in the application of parameters that serve as rules and not simply indications. Rules, not simply indications. No abuse should ever be covered up (as was often the case in the past) or not taken sufficiently seriously, since the covering up of abuses favors the spread of evil and adds a further level of scandal. Also, and in particular, developing new and effective approaches for prevention in all institutions and in every sphere of ecclesial activity. (para 23)

Francis continued to argue that the Church would undertake all available corrective actions and would issue uniform directives and specific enforcement mechanisms aimed at striking a balance between juridical overreaction and clericalist defensiveness:

The time has come, then, to work together to eradicate this evil from the body of our humanity by adopting every necessary measure already in force on the international level and ecclesial levels. The time has come to find a correct equilibrium of all values in play and to provide uniform directives for the Church, avoiding the two extremes of a “justicialism” provoked by guilt for past errors and media pressure, and a defensiveness that fails to confront the causes and effects of these grave crimes. (para 16)

Pope Francis listed several examples of specific corrective actions that would be undertaken by the Church. Not the least of which was a move to advocate for increased and improved abuse awareness training of future priests while at seminary. This strategy could also be categorized as transcendence because, here, Francis argues that something good will come from the tragedy, and society will emerge better off because of it:

Notwithstanding the measures already taken and the progress made in the area of preventing abuse, there is need for a constantly renewed commitment to the holiness of pastors, whose conformity to Christ the Good Shepherd is a right of the People of God. The Church thus restates “her firm resolve to pursue unstintingly a path of purification, questioning how best to protect children, to avoid these tragedies, to bring healing and restoration to the victims, and to improve the training imparted in seminaries... An effort will be made to make past mistakes opportunities for eliminating this scourge, not only from the body of the Church but also from that of society” (ibid.). (Francis, 2019b, para 21).

This reference to improved training for future Catholic priests is both important, and potentially precarious given that the abuse crisis may have left present and future generations of the Catholic leadership simply absent (Britzky, 2018). Along these same strategic lines, Pope Francis argued specifically that measures should be taken to prevent future priests and members of the clergy from becoming addicted to pornography and to the overuse of modern digital media technologies. While this could also be classified as a blame-shifting strategy, as well, in that it deflected blame from individual members of the clergy and placed it on an external social factor, it is employed as corrective action in the context of the speech. Pope Francis was trying to ensure that the new generation of priests was better equipped to handle the pressures and temptations of contemporary life:

Brothers and Sisters: crime does not enjoy the right to freedom. There is an absolute need to combat these abominations with utter determination, to be vigilant and to make every effort to keep the development of young people from being troubled or disrupted by an uncontrolled access to pornography, which will leave deep scars on their minds and hearts. We must ensure that young men and women, particularly seminarians and clergy, are not enslaved to addictions based on the exploitation and criminal abuse of the innocent and their pictures, and contempt for the dignity of women and of the human person. (para 26)

Pope Francis also made a nearly unprecedented move when he advocated listening to the victims of sexual abuse at the hands of the clergy. Here, he argued that the Church has a pastoral duty to provide victims with support, even if that entailed simple listening:

The evil that they have experienced leaves them with indelible wounds that also manifest themselves in resentment and a tendency to self-destruction. The Church thus has the duty to provide them with all the support they need, by availing herself of experts in this field. Listening, let me even put it this way: “wasting time” in listening. Listening heals the hurting person, and likewise heals us of our egoism, aloofness and lack of concern, of the attitude shown by the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan. (para 24)

Given that the Church had been historically unresponsive to concerns of survivors and advocates, this move was especially impactful in theoretically gaining acceptance and at least tacit agreement within the audience to “understand and cooperate with them in return” (Maier, 2005, p.223).

Finally, in an exemplary deployment of the transcendence strategy, Pope Francis attempts to rehabilitate the image of the Catholic organization by envisioning a future free of the scourge of child sexual abuse both in the Church and in society at large. Francis (2019b) writes, “It will be precisely this holy people of God to liberate us from the plague of clericalism, which is the fertile ground for all these disgraces” (para.29). Francis concludes this passage by calling for, in the strongest possible terms (“an all-out battle”), a zero-tolerance policy (“must be erased from the face of the earth”) with regard to this issue:

I make a heartfelt appeal for an all-out battle against the abuse of minors both sexually and in other areas, on the part of all authorities and individuals, for we are dealing with abominable crimes that must be erased from the face of the earth: this is demanded by all the many victims hidden in families and in the various settings of our societies (para. 31).

### *Conclusion*

This chapter identified and set forth the various image restoration strategies used by Pope Francis in his discourse surrounding the 2019 Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church. I argued that Pope Francis relied primarily on a combination of mortification, corrective action, and transcendence strategies, all designed to communicate a change in the Church’s approach to the crisis (see Table 3.1 for summary). Many popular press and mass media outlets, including sources who had previously been vehemently opposed to any moves made by the church at image

rehabilitation, corroborate this analysis. For example, one author noted that the Church's first "official codification of the Church's global policy", led by and described by Pope Francis in his addresses at the Summit, were "thorough about how abuse allegations should be handled and powerful given the backing of the head of the Catholic Church" (Mandel, 2019, para 1 and 2). Coupled with Pope Francis' "revolutionary" move in late December of 2019 to issue new canonical rules which eliminated the practice of protecting accused priests through "pontifical secrecy," the new changes in language and practice had begun to signal "more openness, transparency, and willingness to collaborate with the civil authorities" (Povoledo, 2019, para 13). Whether ultimately judged to be successful or not, "Pope Francis set out to make tackling the abuse crisis one of his foremost priorities upon election in 2013, significantly breaking with his two immediate predecessors" (Mannion, 2018, para. 3).

Tables 3.1: Pope Francis Image Repair Strategies Employed Within His Addresses

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Pope Francis and the ‘Letter to the People of God’

Mortification

An Emotional Admission of Responsibility

Call for Fasting

Deep Mortification: Responsible and Regretful

Corrective Action

A Move Away from Clericalism

Pope Francis Opening Statement at the Summit

Mortification

Accepting Responsibility for Clergy Abuse

Corrective Action

Taking Concrete Actions to Prevent Future Abuses

Transcendence

Prayers for Help to Turn Evil into an Opportunity for Awareness

Pope Francis: Closing Speech at the Summit

Corrective Action

Called for No Excuses and Disciplinary Measures

Self-Accusation

Pursue Every Means Necessary to Protect the Little Ones

Forbade Coverups and Pledged to Bring Perpetrators to Justice

Follow Codified Rules, Not Suggestions

Increased and Improved Abuse Awareness Training

Transcendence

Zero-Tolerance Policy

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Pope Emeritus Benedict's Image Restoration Strategies

Pope Benedict XVI was elected Pope of the Catholic Church in April 2005 following the death of Pope John Paul II. He resigned in February 2013, just two months shy of serving eight years. He is only the second Pope to resign this position in the last 600 years. After resigning, he named himself Pope Emeritus, retaining the style of the current Pope by continuing to wear the papal color of white and making occasional public appearances alongside his successor Pope Francis. During his papacy, his communication generally defended traditional Catholic values, which is why it is no surprise to find that the image restoration strategies used by Pope Emeritus Benedict align with strategies employed and critiqued by scholars in previous decades.

Almost two months after the Vatican sex abuse summit, the first of its kind of meeting among the leaders of the Church, Pope Emeritus Benedict decided to weigh in with his own thoughts about how to best handle the child sex abuse scandal. The 6,000-word letter authored contains many references to the similar image restoration mistakes and missteps that occurred in the Church's 2002 responses to the original exposure of the scandal. Although this memo by Pope Emeritus Benedict mentions how "distressed priests and laity" felt upon hearing of the gross transgressions, the letter lacked any form of apologia or formal defense of the child sex abuse actions and accusations. Rather, this is another iteration of Catholic Church leadership skirting the issues and transgressions and attempting to control the narrative of the scandal by evading responsibility of the

Church to other societal ills. This edict is comprised of over eighty paragraphs, yet the only mention of victims is contained in one short paragraph and references a young women's abuse experience which was not emblematic of most other abuses. The letter is also deficient in mortification, as there is no expression of shame for what has happened nor is there any acceptance of responsibility (see Table 4.1 for summary).

*RQ 1 Findings: Evading Responsibility/Blame Shifting Strategy*

In analyzing the image restoration discourse of Pope Emeritus Benedict, it is important to note that Benedict himself offered a preamble to the edict he released in April 2019. The preamble was an attempt to explain why he chose to break his silence after six years, and to contextualize his position on the child sexual abuse scandal. He also attempted to characterize his unprecedented utterance as supportive of and complementary to the image restoration discourse of Pope Francis.

*No Longer in a Position to Make Change.* Beginning in the preamble, Pope Emeritus Benedict commenced with evading responsibility. While he finds it necessary to author such a letter, he is not without the realization that he, as a retired leader, can no longer directly command solutions to this issue. Just as Van de Meer and Verhoeven (2014) argued how crisis response strategies direct stakeholders' sensemaking and opinions, attempt to repair corporate image, and often employ emotions to influence audiences, Pope Emeritus Benedict used his own plight with this scandal to garner sympathy for himself and the Church in this continued time of crisis. He questions what he could possibly do since he is no longer responsible himself:

Since I myself had served in a position of responsibility as shepherd of the Church at the time of the public outbreak of the crisis, and during the run-up to it, I had to

ask myself – even though, as emeritus, I am no longer directly responsible – what I could contribute to a new beginning (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 4).

This subtle way of evading responsibility sets the tone for the majority of the six-page letter. One purpose this dodging of culpability serves is to reiterate the Pope Emeritus Benedict is no longer responsible for any transgressions committed by the Church. It is the first of many evading responsibility strategies he employs throughout his message. This puts Benedict in a strong rhetorical position, not directly responsible, so he can't be blamed, but also still in a position with influence. Moreover, in this preamble, Pope Emeritus Benedict references the fact that he contacted Pope Francis about this essay, but that is distinct from genuine consultation. In other words, Benedict notified Francis of his intent to publish the essay, but he did not give him an opportunity to edit or revise the essay, or to simply say no. Specifically, he writes: "Having contacted the Secretary of State, Cardinal [Pietro] Parolin and the Holy Father [Pope Francis] himself, it seemed appropriate to publish this text in the *Klerusblatt* [a monthly periodical for clergy in mostly Bavarian dioceses]" (para. 6).

*Shifting Blame to the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s.* In a classic example of blame-shifting, Benedict indicts the sexual revolution of the 1960s and broader socio-moral depravity for the child sex abuse scandal. According to Benedict (2019), "I aim to present briefly the wider social context of the question, without which the problem cannot be understood. I try to show that in the 1960s an egregious event occurred, on a scale unprecedented in history" (para. 8). He specifically argued that pedophilia was culturally sanctioned as acceptable or legitimate during this time period, which allowed him to further blame larger social ills for the actions of hundreds of priests. As said by Benedict,

“It could be said that in the 20 years from 1960 to 1980, the previously normative standards regarding sexuality collapsed entirely, and a new normalcy arose that has by now been the subject of laborious attempts at disruption” (para. 8). This choice of blame-shifting image repair strategy by Pope Emeritus Benedict serves to distract the audience from the culpability of the Church for these transgressions and rather blame the current atmosphere of society as a loose, immoral landscape. He expresses how important it is to understand what was going on in society, that “without it” one cannot possibly understand what is going on with the scandal.

Benedict continues to center the blame on the Revolution of 1968 for the acceptance of pedophilia, and the ways in which the young priests of that generation were corrupted. Pope Emeritus Benedict argues that part of the appearance of the sixties was that it identified and accepted that pedophilia existed. According to Benedict (2019), “the physiognomy of the Revolution of ‘68 was that pedophilia was then also diagnosed as allowed and appropriate. For the young people in the Church, but not only for them, this was in many ways a very difficult time” (para. 15). He explains that this acceptance created a hardship on not only young members of the Church but also the men entering the priesthood journey. Pope Emeritus Benedict concludes this passage by blaming the normalization of pedophilia as causing the collapse of the next wave of clergyman in the Church (2019): “I have always wondered how young people in this situation could approach the priesthood and accept it, with all its ramifications. The extensive collapse of the next generation of priests in those years and the very high number of laicizations were a consequence of all these developments” (para. 16).

Pope Emeritus Benedict (2019) continues to use this image restoration strategy of blaming the 1960s culture of sexuality for corrupting how the Church educates priests in the seminary: “The long-prepared and ongoing process of dissolution of the Christian concept of morality was, as I have tried to show, marked by an unprecedented radicalism in the 1960s” (para. 33). Pope Emeritus Benedict explains that the acceptance of the lax nature in the way that young priests are prepared for is to blame for the abuses at hand:

This dissolution of the moral teaching authority of the Church necessarily had to have an effect on the diverse areas of the Church. In the context of the meeting of the presidents of the episcopal conferences from all over the world with Pope Francis, the question of priestly life, as well as that of seminaries, is of particular interest. As regards the problem of preparation for priestly ministry in seminaries, there is in fact a far-reaching breakdown of the previous form of this preparation. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 33)

*Shifting the Blame to Sexual Education of Children.* Later in the speech, Pope Emeritus Benedict again enlists in blame shifting and evading responsibility in his choice of image restoration strategies. He starts a new argument, advocating that it was the forcible introduction of sexuality to children in the form of sex education, as to blame for the state of the crisis today. According to Benedict (2019), “The matter begins with the state-prescribed and supported introduction of children and youths into the nature of sexuality” (para. 11). Benedict explained that the then Minister of Health in Germany allowed a film to be produced that included many aspects of sexuality previously forbidden to be shown on film. According to Benedict (2019), items and actions “including sexual intercourse, was now shown for the purpose of education. What at first was only intended for the sexual education of young people consequently was widely accepted as a feasible option” (para. 11).

Benedict (2019) draws attention to a move by the Austrian government to introduce sexuality to children by way of sex education, “Similar effects were achieved by the “Sexkoffer” published by the Austrian government [A controversial ‘suitcase’ of sex education materials used in Austrian schools in the late 1980s]” (para. 12). He concludes that this introduction into sexuality for children directed society to a place where it became more commonplace and accepted. That open nature toward speaking of sexuality and including it in how we were educating our children and society contributed to the crisis’s prevalence today. And that our acceptance of more sexuality within our society is what has led to further peril. He continues to blame the pervasive societal acceptance of pornography and acceptance of an evolving, more secular style of sex education as responsible for the child sex abuse transgressions. According to Benedict (2019), “Sexual and pornographic movies then became a common occurrence, to the point that they were screened at newsreel theaters [*Bahnhofsinos*]” (para. 12).

*Shifting the Blame to Moral Relativism.* The next several paragraphs of this letter adopt a more pastoral, official-sounding tone of pronouncements rather than a message from a retired Pope to the membership of the church. At this point, he addresses the concept of moral relativism. According to Garcia (2009), “the Catholic hierarchy does not see the need to respond to public opinion; it feels obligated to offer explanations only to Christ” (p.71). Through that lens, we can anticipate Pope Emeritus Benedict’s continuing of blame shifting along the lines of those employed by the Church in 2002. By arguing that, essentially, Western society has diluted morality, the blame shifts once more:

I still remember how the Jesuit faculty in Frankfurt trained a highly gifted young Father (Bruno Schüller) with the purpose of developing a morality based entirely on Scripture. Father Schüller's beautiful dissertation shows a first step towards building a morality based on Scripture. Father Schüller was then sent to America for further studies and came back with the realization that from the Bible alone morality could not be expressed systematically. He then attempted a more pragmatic moral theology, without being able to provide an answer to the crisis of morality. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 19)

According to Pope Emeritus Benedict (2019), society has succumbed to moral relativism and the belief that there is no absolute good or evil, but rather only “relatively better” (para 20). He slowly and pastorally contends that this dilution of morality over time can be seen as the cause of the epidemic of pedophilia and the reason for its intensity in recent times. Pope Emeritus Benedict continues to argue against this moral relativism by educating his audience to the fact that his predecessor John Paul II knew about the dangers of moral relativism and authored a papal letter sent to all Roman Catholic bishops concluding that some things are absolutely bad. According to Benedict (2019), “Pope John Paul II, who knew very well the situation of moral theology and followed it closely, commissioned work on an encyclical that would set these things right again” (para. 22). This letter did not meet with open acceptance, in fact, it attracted passionate negative reactions among theology experts. He continues in great length to remark on the necessity of Pope John Paul's letter and the importance of the acknowledgement of a finality in moral reasoning. According to Benedict (2019), the papal letter “did indeed include the determination that there were actions that can never become good. The pope was fully aware of the importance of this decision at that moment and for this part of his text” (para. 24). Again, the extent of content surrounding this pastoral jaunt of moral relativism, extends what Garcia (2009) argued about not having to respond to publics but rather God himself. Benedict (2019) writes:

He knew that he must leave no doubt about the fact that the moral calculus involved in balancing goods must respect a final limit. There are goods that are never subject to trade-offs. There are values which must never be abandoned for a greater value and even surpass the preservation of physical life. There is martyrdom. God is (about) more than mere physical survival. A life that would be bought by the denial of God, a life that is based on a final lie, is a non-life. (para 24-26)

*Shifting Blame to the Apathetic and Lax Attitudes of Clergy Within the Church.*

Another example of his blame shifting and even some dissociation image restoration strategies can be seen when he explains that the lax attitudes of clergy within the Church itself can be blamed for transgressions that have occurred and has led to this gross crisis within the Catholic Church. According to Benedict (2019), “Indeed, in many parts of the Church, conciliar attitudes were understood to mean having a critical or negative attitude towards the hitherto existing tradition, which was now to be replaced by a new, radically open relationship with the world” (para. 36). Again, Benedict uses the laxity of Bishops within the church to uphold the moral integrity of the faith, citing their attempt to reinvent the entire faith as key elements of failure. According to Benedict (2019), “One bishop, who had previously been seminary rector, had arranged for the seminarians to be shown pornographic films, allegedly with the intention of thus making them resistant to behavior contrary to the faith” (para. 36).

Pope Emeritus Benedict continued in this vein by explaining that some bishops were looking to modernize their dioceses and thus excluded certain Catholic traditions in order to bring about change. Pope Emeritus Benedict includes that even his own books that would have been stark in Catholic tradition were considered inappropriate for clergy on their priestly journey (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 37).

*Shifting the Blame as a Western Problem and New Issue.* In yet another attempt to shift blame away from his leadership, Pope Emeritus Benedict attempts to direct responsibility toward the U.S. as the source of the pedophilia problem. According to Benedict (2019), “the question of pedophilia, as I recall, did not become acute until the second half of the 1980s. In the meantime, it had already become a public issue in the U.S” (para. 38), here he takes a stab at classifying pedophilia as first becoming commonplace in the U.S. He continues to explain that the Rome bishops sought after help because the diluted criminal code was the reason so many priests were left unpunished. According to Benedict (2019), canon law “did not seem sufficient for taking the necessary measures” (para. 38).

Pope Emeritus Benedict also indicates with his choice of words that the child sex abuse issue is a relatively new problem (“theorized only a short time ago”). He could be using this approach to foster a bit of defeasibility, meaning that the Church didn’t have enough information of the magnitude of the issue to act. Pope Emeritus Benedict (2019) explains how pedophilia has grown into the massive problem it is in today’s society, “that is the case with pedophilia. It was theorized only a short time ago as quite legitimate, but it has spread further and further” (para. 60). While he engages in more of the same blame shifting of the source of pedophilia as he had previously in his letter, he indicates that it is not a unique problem within the Church but rather a problem with an absence of God and society’s acceptance of the scourge of pedophilia. As Benedict (2019) concludes in one of the only times he invokes shame, but not in a traditional mortification style because it is shame directed at how shocked we should be, not at the problem itself, “and now we realize with shock that things are happening to our children and young people that

threaten to destroy them. The fact that this could also spread in the Church and among priests ought to disturb us in particular” (para. 60).

Pope Emeritus Benedict again cites the absence of God and our lack of desire to discuss God as some of causes of the child sex abuse scandal predicament. According to Benedict (2019), “Why did pedophilia reach such proportions? Ultimately, the reason is the absence of God. We Christians and priests also prefer not to talk about God, because this speech does not seem to be practical” (para.61). He again attempts to convince the audience that the overall problem of pedophilia was not only rejection of God but also sourced first in the West:

Half a century later, it was no longer possible to include responsibility to God as a guiding principle in the European constitution. God is regarded as the party concern of a small group and can no longer stand as the guiding principle for the community as a whole. This decision reflects the situation in the West, where God has become the private affair of a minority. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 61)

Overall Pope Emeritus Benedict enacted the same type of image repair strategy that Maier (2005) warned against in previous Church leadership, that the leaders of the Catholic Church should have been more open and attentive to publics rather than attempt to control the situation and conversation. In 2005, Maier urged organizations in crisis like the Church to re-conceptualize how they view hostile publics, and, fifteen years later, the same strategy is attempted by Pope Emeritus Benedict.

### *RQ1 Findings: Denial Strategy*

At this point in his letter, Pope Emeritus Benedict strayed away from his blame shifting approach to image repair and flips the script to portray the Catholic Church as the victim to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. He cited that because of changes in moral

theology, the Church was defenseless against the claims. According to Benedict (2019) “At the same time, independently of this development, Catholic moral theology suffered a collapse that rendered the Church defenseless against these changes in society” (para. 17). Once again, he makes a claim that “the Church was defenseless against these changes” and offers more pastoral and religiously complex supporting evidence. This type of message style is lost on the layperson and majority of membership of the Catholic Church. This is his attempt at seeking sorrow for the Church and its plight, a sort of denial strategy of sorts.

About halfway through his letter, Pope Emeritus Benedict took time to clarify the word of Jesus, and insisted that care for the “Little Ones” mandated a protection for the Catholic faith as well as the accused:

Allow me a brief excursus at this point. In light of the scale of pedophilic misconduct, a word of Jesus has again come to attention which says: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea” (Mark 9:42) The phrase “the little ones” in the language of Jesus means the common believers who can be confounded in their faith by the intellectual arrogance of those who think they are clever. So here Jesus protects the deposit of the faith with an emphatic threat of punishment to those who do it harm. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, paras. 41-42)

In this passage, Pope Emeritus Benedict plainly entered into more denial in that, in his mind, the accused and the Catholic faith are the only two elements that warrant protection within the crisis and not that of the victim. He redefined the definition of “little ones” to include the “deposit” of the faith, or the entire membership, rather than a literal translation lending itself to children within the faith. In his new definition, there is no mention of the victims of the abuse and the protections that should be afforded to them:

The modern use of the sentence is not in itself wrong, but it must not obscure the original meaning. In that meaning, it becomes clear, contrary to any guarantorism,

that it is not only the right of the accused that is important and requires a guarantee. Great goods such as the Faith are equally important (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 43).

In fact, in the only example given by Pope Emeritus Benedict related to talking to one of the victims, it was not a representative segment of the victims (males). Pope Emeritus Benedict talked to one victim, a female who had been abused by a male member of the clergy. Yes, he recognizes the victim, but not male altar boys, the prototypical victim:

In conversations with victims of pedophilia, I have been made acutely aware of this first and foremost requirement. A young woman who was a [former] altar server told me that the chaplain, her superior as an altar server, always introduced the sexual abuse he was committing against her with the words: “This is my body which will be given up for you.” It is obvious that this woman can no longer hear the very words of consecration without experiencing again all the horrific distress of her abuse. Yes, we must urgently implore the Lord for forgiveness, and first and foremost we must swear by Him and ask Him to teach us all anew to understand the greatness of His suffering, His sacrifice. And we must do all we can to protect the gift of the Holy Eucharist from abuse. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 69).

And finally, in his conclusion regarding what should be warranted protection in the scandal, he directed attention strongly to the notion that a balanced canon law would not only protect the accused but also protect the “good at stake” or the Faith. Deetz (1982) concluded that individual perceptions of an organization are not individually created, but rather come from an initial orientation by that organization, or in this case one of its leaders. Therefore, if one of our leaders is supporting a story with only protections for the accused and the Faith, then how is the membership to feel for the victims, especially after Pope Francis urges us to feel shame for the victims? These competing leadership messages will cause confusion by the membership on how the organization feels for the victims of these child sex abuse transgressions.

In his next passage, Pope Emeritus Benedict attempted to shed light on the highly complex nature of bringing action unto an accused member of the Church. According to Benedict (2019), “the Congregation of the Clergy is responsible for dealing with crimes committed by priests” (para. 46), but that the “guarantorism” control the situation at the time. Here, he attempted to use subtle denial that the former leadership of the Church (his leadership) lacked taking action on accusations of transgressions. According to Benedict (2019), “I agreed with Pope John Paul II that it was appropriate to assign the competence for these offences to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith” (para. 46).

In this same effort, he further diverted blame of the lack of prosecutions during his tenure as leader of the Catholic Church. According to Benedict (2019), “This arrangement also made it possible to impose the maximum penalty, i.e., expulsion from the clergy, which could not have been imposed under other legal provisions” (para. 47). He explained in great detail who will preside over such trials, including the Pope himself, and the process for appeal but admits to why even this failed. According to Benedict (2019), “Because all of this actually went beyond the capacities of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and because delays arose which had to be prevented owing to the nature of the matter, Pope Francis has undertaken further reforms” (para. 51). While there has been no fault attributed to the former leadership at this point during the study, it is telling that he found it necessary to defend his leadership and the Church’s reputation prior to Pope Francis’ changes.

### *RQ1 Findings: Differentiation and Corrective Action Strategy*

Pope Emeritus Benedict spent an enormous amount of time defending the authority that the Church should have in questions of morality, a strong contrast to Pope

Francis' statements rejecting the notion that members of the Catholic Church are infallible. Pope Emeritus Benedict tried to thwart ideas that the answer to this crisis and, thus, appropriate correction action is to remove power from the Church and assume that anyone is capable of faltering.

In moral theology, however, another question had meanwhile become pressing: The hypothesis that the Magisterium of the Church should have final competence [infallibility] only in matters concerning the faith itself gained widespread acceptance; (in this view) questions concerning morality should not fall within the scope of infallible decisions of the Magisterium of the Church. There is probably something right about this hypothesis that warrants further discussion. But there is a minimum set of morals which is indissolubly linked to the foundational principle of faith and which must be defended if faith is not to be reduced to a theory but rather to be recognized in its claim to concrete life. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 28)

Pope Emeritus Benedict further emphasized the importance of keeping the authority of the Church intact for all issues, including those of morality. According to Benedict (2019), "All this makes apparent just how fundamentally the authority of the Church in matters of morality is called into question" (para. 29). Benedict (2019) warned that "those who deny the Church a final teaching competence in this area force her to remain silent precisely where the boundary between truth and lies is at stake" (para. 29).

Pope Emeritus Benedict attempted to employ a corrective action strategy by calling for us to submit to God's love rather than attempt any sort of change within the Church. He tried to clarify that the real answer is more Faith and a closer relationship to God. Benoit (1997) concluded that it can be "extremely important to report plans to correct and/or prevent recurrence of the problem (p. 184). Seeing that this call for us to submit to God's love is the only corrective action Pope Emeritus Benedict truly called for, it begs the question as to whether this corrective action is enough given the horrific nature of the scandal.

What must be done? Perhaps we should create another Church for things to work out? Well, that experiment has already been undertaken and has already failed. Only obedience and love for our Lord Jesus Christ can point the way. So let us first try to understand anew and from within [ourselves] what the Lord wants, and has wanted with us. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 52)

Pope Emeritus Benedict further argued the importance of loving God. He explained that the refusal to love God is what gives evil its power. According to Benedict (2019), “The counterforce against evil, which threatens us and the whole world, can ultimately only consist in our entering into this love. It is the real counterforce against evil. The power of evil arises from our refusal to love God” (para. 53). Therefore, evil is allowed to occur within a world where members are not agreeing to enter into this love, that it is the only path to redemption. According to Benedict (2019), “He who entrusts himself to the love of God is redeemed. Our being not redeemed is a consequence of our inability to love God. Learning to love God is therefore the path of human redemption” (para. 53).

Toward the end of his letter, Pope Emeritus Benedict argued that while we could take corrective action, and redesign the Church and its structures, but that wouldn't be good. Instead, even the bad priests have some good; they are still the people of God. This strategy was an attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the scandal and change the minds of the public that the entire Church is bad. Pope Emeritus Benedict explained:

Indeed, the Church today is widely regarded as just some kind of political apparatus. One speaks of it almost exclusively in political categories, and this applies even to bishops, who formulate their conception of the church of tomorrow almost exclusively in political terms. The crisis, caused by the many cases of clerical abuse, urges us to regard the Church as something almost unacceptable, which we must now take into our own hands and redesign. But a self-made Church cannot constitute hope. Jesus Himself compared the Church to a fishing net in which good and bad fish are ultimately separated by God Himself. (Benedict, 2019, as cited in Catholic News Agency, 2019, para. 73).

In another parable offered by Pope Emeritus Benedict (2019), he likened the Church to “a field on which the good grain that God Himself has sown grows, but also the weeds that ‘an enemy’ secretly sown onto it” (para. 74). According to Benedict (2019), he reiterated how each it necessary to have the bad with the good and that is not for us to decide, “Indeed, the weeds in God’s field, the Church, are excessively visible, and the evil fish in the net also show their strength. Nevertheless, the field is still God’s field and the net is God’s fishing net” (para. 74). In doing so, he makes the case that we can’t throw out the entire Church because of these few bad apples involved in the scandal.

As part of a final image repair strategy, Pope Emeritus Benedict (2019) warned his audience that “the accusation against God is, above all, about characterizing His Church as entirely bad, and thus dissuading us from it” (para. 79). Benedict insisted that the Church doesn’t need corrective action, or any action for that matter. According to Benedict (2019), “the idea of a better Church, created by ourselves, is in fact a proposal of the devil, with which he wants to lead us away from the living God, through a deceitful logic by which we are too easily duped” (para. 79). Pope Emeritus Benedict (2019) infused the differentiation strategy of “a few bad apples” to counter the argument that the entire Church is evil when he writes, “no, even today the Church is not just made up of bad fish and weeds. The Church of God also exists today, and today it is the very instrument through which God saves us” (para. 79).

Overall, what lacked in Pope Emeritus Benedict’s letter was any reflection or mention of mortification as a strategy worth pursuing. He not only didn’t mention any

shame in the six-page message, but not even support for the mortification Pope Francis requested in his communications.

Tables 3.1: Pope Emeritus Benedict Image Repair Strategies Employed Within His Letter

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Evading responsibility/Blame Shifting
No Longer in a Position to Make Change
Shifting the Blame to the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s
Shifting the Blame to Sexual Education of Children
Shifting the Blame to Moral Relativism
Shifting Blame to the Apathetic and Lax Attitudes Within the Church.
Denial
Changes in Moral Theology
The Accused and Faith are the Only Elements Worth Protecting
Example of Victim Used Was Misrepresentative
Corrective Action
Call to Submit to God's Love
Taking Action to Correct the Church is a Tool of the Devil

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Note: To access the full text of Pope Emeritus Benedict's Letter visit this website:  
<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/04/11/full-text-of-benedict-xvi-the-church-and-the-scandal-of-sexual-abuse/>

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A Tale of Two Popes

In the preceding chapters, I have systematically identified the image repair strategies employed by both Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict, during the months prior to and directly following the historic summit on child sex abuse in the Church. In this final chapter I will lay out the findings to RQ two and three, regarding the strategic divergence in the discourses of the two Popes, and the impact of dual leadership coupled with contradictory messaging on the effectiveness of the Church's crisis communication.

*RQ 2: Findings: How Do the Image Restoration Strategies of Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict Differ or Converge in Their Discourse Surrounding the 2019 Summit Meeting?*

As I argued in Chapter Two, the image repair strategies of Pope Francis represent a substantial step in the right direction. While there are certainly still detractors and critics who argue that Francis' rhetoric is simply more of the same, and the rehabilitation of the Church's image will likely take decades, the textual analysis undertaken here does reveal legitimate changes in the trajectory of the Pope's crisis communication and image repair discourse. As I indicated in Chapter Three, Benedict's uninvited and truly unorthodox communication on this issue represents a problematic return and retrenchment to some of the same strategic approaches that helped to create the situational dilemma faced by the Church in the first place. Indeed, this study confirms

significant points of divergence, and even direct contradiction, in the image restoration approaches of the two Popes.

First, and perhaps most obviously, while Pope Francis advocated for shared blame, shared responsibility, and collective penance for the mishandling of the sexual abuse crisis, Pope Benedict continued to rely on shifting the blame to external social and cultural influences (the 1960s, pornography, sex education in schools, etc.). In a situation such as this one, where mortification and the acceptance of responsibility are called for, Benedict's statements would have created doubt within the audience (parishioners) about whether or not the Catholic Church, as an organization, truly believes that it is responsible for the crisis. Indeed,

Organization members often look to (leaders) for informal cues about how to behave and what to think. If they handle themselves well ... leaders can have a powerful impact on organization members' perceptions of what their organization really cares about (Sadowski, 2019, para 13).

This facet of organizational behavior helps to frame and support my claims about how the audience should, in theory, process the competing image restoration claims made by the two Popes. The members of the organization look to the leadership, in this case, the Pope(s), to filter their own feelings about the crisis and how they believe the organization should react. In this instance, Pope Francis relied heavily on mortification strategies including personal acceptance of responsibility and repeated references to the Church mishandling the situation. Pope Emeritus Benedict, on the other hand, "did not assess his own role in the crisis, during which he held power for decades, first behind the scenes, and then for nearly eight years as pontiff" (Harlan & Pitrelli, 2019, para 6). It is also here that Benedict's strategies of portraying the Church as "defenseless" in light of the social

and cultural changes brought about in the 1960s come into sharp contrast when compared with Francis' calls for self-accusation, acceptance of responsibility, and corrective action.

A second area of strategic divergence between the Popes is in the glaring difference in how each refers to and describes the victims and survivors of abuse by priests and members of the clergy. While Francis literally wallows in mortification and the expression of emotional sorrow at the depth and impact of the scandal and its transgressions, Pope Benedict hardly mentions the 'little ones'. While Francis argues that no explanation or excuse, or justification, or words themselves, are ever sufficient to describe and frame the depth of evil entailed in the scandal, Benedict attempts to shift the blame to a few bad priests and minimize the damage. While Francis attempted to acknowledge the victims and the transgressions they suffered, and to directly apologize, Benedict made reference to an example that is almost sickening in its ignorance of what was transpiring. In that case, Benedict had spoken to a female parishioner who was harassed and assaulted by a male member of the clergy; an egregious example of an abuse of power, and obviously something that should never happen, but also an example that was not representative of the majority of the abuses which were perpetrated by male members of the clergy against underage boys in the Church. Benedict's example is non-representative, but worse, is also insulting because it continues to both silence and denigrate the victims of sexual abuse by Catholic priests and persons in positions of leadership within the Church. Benedict's continued reliance on the position that the problem of pedophilia, and thus the scandal in the priesthood, was caused by the liberal social and sexual norms and practices in the 1960s is also another attempt to cover up the presence of homosexuality in the ranks of the priesthood.

A third area of obvious divergence is in how both Popes engage and deploy the use of corrective action strategies as part of their image restoration discourse. While Pope Francis engaged in multifaceted, detailed, specific explanations of the ongoing and future corrective action strategies that the Church would be pursuing, Benedict denied the need for corrective action, by arguing that any move to make the Church better was the work of Satan, because the Church was perfect, and made in God's image, and man couldn't possibly hope to improve on the work of God. For Francis, corrective action is to be found in codified rules and procedures for identifying, investigating, and prosecuting abusers; it is to be found in new and improved training in the seminaries; it is to be found in law enforcement when necessary. For Benedict, on the other hand, corrective action and salvation from the crisis can only be found in immersion in the word of God, and increased reverence to the leaders of the Church. These conflicting messages would have created confusion in the minds of all audiences about the Church's depth of commitment to corrective action. The importance of this particular angle of Benedict's image repair discourse cannot be overstated; as Von Drehl (2019) argued, "when the emeritus — or superfluous — pope steps in to offer a shield against the necessary accountability and humility, it's clear the church has a problem (para 10)".

Fourth, part of Pope Francis explanation for the horrific and far-reaching scandal is that the Church's traditional, dogmatic, and unchecked deference to clericalism created conditions in which deference to title and hierarchy served to mask transgressions by high-ranking members of the Catholic clergy and leadership. Francis vowed to end the practice and tradition of clericalism, as part of the broad-based corrective action strategies he put forth in the closing remarks at the Summit speech. Conversely, Pope

Emeritus Benedict “insists it was about the abdication of authority beginning with the sexual revolution of the 1960s” and the lack of respect for and reverence to the clergy (Walker, 2019, para 2). Herein lies one of the most critical findings of this project: I argue that it is the organizational structure of the Catholic Church, heavily reliant on clericalism as a foundational building block, that may have both contributed to the scandal, and complicated its response. Sadowski (2019) also concluded that “organizational behavior within the church may have contributed to the clerical sexual abuse crisis”, and so in this case, the audience of Catholic parishioners, already confused by the virtually unprecedented presence of two Popes, is faced with conflicting image restoration messages delivered by Francis and Benedict (para 1). Francis sees clericalism as something to be eliminated, and based his corrective action strategy around this claim, vowing to eliminate clerical deference and cover-ups. Benedict, on the other hand, views more reverence to clerical authority, and to God, as the only way to correct or recover from the crisis.

Fifth, the use of transcendence strategies by Pope Francis, designed to try and outline potential positive benefits that could arise out of the tragedy, and to move the audience past the crisis at hand, were countered directly by Pope Emeritus Benedict, whose strategies can only be interpreted and labeled as retrenchment and undergirded with a traditionalist/fundamentalist understanding of the causes of the child sex abuse scandal. Rather than seeking to evolve the Church through its handling of and response to the crisis, as Francis has envisioned, Benedict’s lack of forward thought is “almost an excuse for the one thing he is truly interested in: the traditionalist restoration inside the Church” (Harlan & Pitrelli, 2019, para 7). It is these competing visions of the future of

the Church, espoused by two different leaders, that I argue created confusion and distrust in the audiences, rather than a restoration of the Church's image, or saving face.

Similarly, those parishioners who were genuinely concerned about the victims of the abuse, and concerned about the future response of the organization, but who were also among those identified earlier in the study who were questioning their adherence to the faith

*RQ3 Findings: What Impact Does Dual Leadership Messaging Have on the Credibility and Effectiveness of Papal Image Restoration Discourse with Both Internal (Leadership and Clergy) and External (Parishioners, the General Public) Audiences?*

I argue that the conflicting and contradictory image restoration strategies used by Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict had a negative impact on the effectiveness of that communication with all of the aforementioned audiences. At the more general level, for Catholic audiences the very idea of having to deliberate between the arguments of competing Popes is sure to cause dissonance and dissociation with the faith. First, for parishioners who needed to be reassured about the honesty, intent, efficacy, and continued viability of their chosen faith, the deployment of contradictory messages by two different Popes must be confusing, indeed confounding, particularly for those large numbers of people who are questioning their faith and member adherence over the continued mishandling of the child sex abuse scandal.

Second, having two different spokespersons for the organization, both of whom are delivering contradictory messages, surely dilutes the cohesion of the image repair message. Coombs (2010) argues that even in organizations with more than one spokesperson, those individuals are sure to 'speak with one voice' to avoid dilution of the

message (p.29). For organizational audiences and stakeholders, being consistent with messaging and strategic choice is essential to building or re-building credibility. “Inconsistencies create confusion and make crisis managers appear to be incompetent” (Coombs, 2010, p.29). In the case of the two Popes, there were obvious inconsistencies and contradictions in their image restoration discourse, which likely negatively impacted the move to re-build credibility with the audience.

#### *Recommendations for Best Practices in Future Image Restoration Discourse*

In terms of recommendations for future best practices and practical options that would bolster the image restoration discourses of the Catholic Church, I suggest several options that are supported by the literature. First, typically the use of corrective action strategies by organizations in crisis is limited to the mere promise to take needed preventative and compensatory measures to correct the problem. In this case, that is exactly what the Church has done; since the Church is notably ‘behind’ in addressing the issue, it will take time for the new corrective actions to have an effect. I argue that these strategies would be more successful if they were supported by evidence to demonstrate that the new measures had actually worked, because as of now, the proposed actions sound good, but are not supported by data which suggest they will be effective in combating child sexual abuse by Catholic priests. Benoit (2014) argued that in the case of the BP oil spill disaster (also a multi-dimensional crisis which threatened the existence of BP as an organization), the corporation “provided considerable evidence...to support its image repair strategies” (p.57). Benoit argued that for BP, this inclusion of specific evidence helped to bolster the organizations claims that it had indeed taken the right measures to address/redress the crisis. For the Church, in this regard, time will tell.

Second, to avoid confusion among the parishioners over who is in charge, and whose word matters in terms of papal edicts and guidance, the Church should take measures to clarify the situation should Benedict continue in his increasingly public role as Emeritus Pope. According to one observer:

Recent high-stakes polemics surrounding not only the person, but the position of the Pope emeritus, have made it clear that establishing something like an “office” of Pope emeritus could be critical. It would prevent confusion. It would even give more freedom to the reigning Pope (Gagliarducci, 2019, para 1).

While this strategy may not satisfy traditionalists in the Church who demand a return to the one-Pope system, it may be the best practical solution available in terms of reducing uncertainty among stakeholders and unifying the message emanating from the Vatican. Indeed, from an organizational identity perspective, “the fact that shared leadership exists doesn’t make it a good practice, or necessarily better than the solo variety” (O’Toole, Galbraith, and Lawler, 2002, p.68). Particularly with regard to an institution unaccustomed to the concept of shared or co-leadership, now is not the time for the Catholic Church to embrace this particular type of organizational change.

Third, the Church must place more emphasis on its public-facing communication generally, and more specific emphasis on its crisis communication contingency planning. One author was astounded at the “lack of importance the Church places on communication”, complaining that “the Church has still not discovered that there is no effective action on this without effective communication” (Trancu, 2019, para 19). Indeed, the Church, throughout the lifetime of the scandal, has shown little sense of public relations savvy, despite its obvious similarities to a large, multinational corporation, and its status a large, hierarchical non-profit organization. Making matters worse, “the communication of the Vatican is situated far behind the possibilities and

demands of modern communication” (Stohmeier, 2009, p.46). In other words, pretending that social media does not exist is simply not an option for the Catholic leadership at this point. Similarly, the lack of codified and institutionalized communication policies complicates the relationship of the Church to the media, which in turn impacts the ability of the Church to control the timing, trajectory, and content of its media communications. Langett (2017) argued that given the recurring nature of the sexual abuse crisis in the Church, and the repulsive nature of pedophilia, it might be best for the Church to simply embrace the perpetual organizational ruptures and upheavals that accompany these types of accusations and reframe their occurrence as part and parcel of the Church’s organizational identity and penance for transgression (p.108).

#### *Contributions to the Field of Communication*

My thesis makes a couple of interesting and unique contributions to the discipline. First, this project serves as a useful case study which examines a timely, indeed ongoing, organizational crisis communication situation. The depth and egregious nature of the crisis, and its unrelenting nature, has rocked the Catholic Church to its foundations. One would be hard pressed to identify an organization that had undergone such a level of internal and external upheaval and had not collapsed under the weight of its own incompetence and arrogance. This study argues that the leadership of religious organizations like the Catholic Church, steeped in structure and hierarchy in order to maintain member adherence, do themselves a disservice by engaging in competing and contradictory image restoration strategies, particularly when voiced by two Popes, which creates audience confusion in and of itself. In this way, my thesis serves as a way to both

confirm and extend Benoit's theory of image repair discourse to the realm of religious organizations.

Second, in extraordinary cases where people die or suffer great personal injury because of the negligence or malfeasance of an organization, in this case the Catholic Church, Benoit argued that simple apologies were insufficient. In situations like this one, the leadership must exemplify deep mortification that goes beyond a simple apology. A textbook example of mortification, for Benoit, demands that the apologist: "accept responsibility, acknowledges the suffering of the victims without attempting to diminish the undesirable consequences they suffered, and directly apologizes for the offensive act" (1994, p.82). In this case, the image repair strategies of Pope Francis meet the criteria set up by Benoit for an act of mortification that should resonate with the core constituents of the organization; the parishioners of the Catholic Church, the Cardinals, Bishops and other clergy, and other concerned public audiences. However, the conflicting image repair discourses of Pope Emeritus Benedict, heavy on the use of blame-shifting and minimization, decidedly do not meet these criteria, and ultimately functioned to cloud, dilute, and confuse the message emanating from the Church. Ultimately, this study serves then to enrich and extend Benoit's notions of what constitutes sufficient mortification for an organization who has accepted responsibility for grave wrongdoing.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the burgeoning literature on dual leadership and/or co-leadership in organizations. In the example explored herein, an unofficial dual leadership situation in the Catholic Church existed in which Pope Francis served as the appointed Pope, but whose authority was ultimately undermined when Pope Benedict emerged in an emeritus role. Though Francis was the appointed leader, Benedict broke

his silence at an untimely moment, and appeared in both timing and tone, to be undermining the word of Pope Francis. Not only did the mere public presence of the two Popes confuse and divide audiences from parishioners to the press, but when those two leaders engaged in contradictory messaging, the desired impact on those audiences was lost. Based on the example explored here, one could conclude that dual leadership is potentially problematic in religious organizations, particularly those in turmoil, and as holds true with crisis communication generically, the employment of conflicting or contradictory image repair strategies is likely to fail.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

One of the hardest parts of conducting this study was narrowing down its focus and deciding what approaches to exclude from the parameters of the project. Many of those “discarded” ideas might be interesting in terms of future research in this sub-field. For instance, because of the size and scope of this project, and because of the unique benefits of studying the particular timeframe I have isolated here, a deeper dive into the earliest incantations of the Church’s crisis response have been omitted. Indeed, Pope John Paul II was well aware of the nascent scandal, and began both the process of public response, and private cover-up, which was to embody the Church’s approach for decades. A dissertation-length version of this project would likely be organized chronologically and start in the early 1980s rather than in 2019, as is the case here.

Additionally, there is obviously a quantitative counterpart to this study in which one could use questionnaires and surveys to gauge the relative in/effectiveness of the crisis communication strategies employed by the leadership of the Catholic Church. Specifically, the surveys could also be designed to test the level of audience confusion

created by the appearance of Pope Emeritus Benedict, and the degree to which they felt conflicted based on the belief among most Catholics that there is truly only one Pope. Similar quantitative studies could be conducted with non-Catholics or other concerned public audiences in order to establish a comparison group(s), and to gauge the effect of image repair strategies among out-groups. If I were to expand this thesis into a dissertation-length project at some point in the future, the infusion of the quantitative component would be the first angle I would seriously consider. It would be helpful to have hard evidence that backed my conclusions, rather than on ultimately making an assertion (albeit a well-educated and painstakingly researched assertion) about how audiences would likely respond in a given situation, given similar situational and rhetorical constraints.

Another avenue of potential research could be related to the ongoing nature of the scandal, and the ongoing, evolving crisis communication response from Pope Francis (and potentially Pope Emeritus Benedict). It would be interesting to track the trajectory of their image repair discourse as the scandal continues to unfold, new cases and allegations continue to surface, and new public and internal pressures continue to mount. Will Pope Francis continue to employ the right image repair approaches? Will Benedict continue to interject on this issue, or will he maintain his silence, as he initially pledged to do? If Benedict does continue to weigh in on the crisis, will he continue to engage in brazenly contradictory strategies? How will the audience respond to the continued dual leadership at the top of the Catholic hierarchy? These are all research questions that could be answered by additional investigation in this area.

Finally, there are a number of projects in this area that could revolve around the examination of cultural portrayals of the scandal in films, television, and other mediums. Quantitative or qualitative studies that examined the truth of the ‘Spotlight effect’, which many people believe helped to translate into real-world action and awareness of the cover-up within the Church, could hold promise. Similarly, films like ‘Sleepers’ and ‘Primal Fear’, which depict victims taking revenge on their Catholic abusers, could be analyzed from a rhetorical or psychoanalytic perspective. Like the scandal itself, the multimedia representations and portrayals of the scandal, its victims, its perpetrators, and its investigators, lend themselves to investigation from a number of theoretical and methodological approaches.

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