

# The clergy child sexual abuse and its cover-up in media: An explorative study of the official Vatican media and American Catholic media in 2013–2020

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The current study enables an explorative view of the media coverage of the clergy child sexual abuse (CSA) in the Catholic Church. It is based on the contemporary knowledge of the phenomenon of clergy CSA, key Church documents on the topic of ethics in media, recent commitments situated in the core of the Vatican media reform, and decisive public speech of Pope Francis. A quantitative content analysis of the Vatican media channel *Vatican News* and the American news site *Crux Now*, which covers Vatican and Church news from the Catholic perspective in the period 2013–2020, serves as the method. The year 2019 represents the clear high peak of pushing agenda of clergy CSA forward. In comparison, *Crux Now* generally concentrates on the topic more frequently and in more practical or procession way, whereas *Vatican News* pays attention to its spiritual part, the “theology of victims”, and to the fact that rule of law has not always the final word.

*Keywords:* Vatican media, reform, Pope Francis, clergy sexual abuse, abuse crisis

Church structures that solidify power imbalances and protect abusers support clerical child sexual abuse (CSA) as do individuals who abuse power. Thereby, the “damage [...] depends on the power differential” and thus harms the less powerful person (Ormerod, 1995, p. xii). “Under conditions of privacy and confidentiality, Catholic priests and religious have access to people who are emotionally and spiritually vulnerable” (Podles, 2007, p. 17), which provides a protective framework for (potential) perpetrators. Vulnerability refers to the young age in this context, but it does also to personal or psychological problems, which may manifest for instance by emotional turmoil, weakness, and piety (ibid, p. 357). Those vulnerabilities may also arise from prior CSA victimization, child abuse, mental or physical fragility in close relatives (Assink et al., 2019), or social isolation (Fleming et al., 1997) – all factors which may drive children to the comfort of the Church but also makes them vulnerable to individuals who take advantage of their situation. According to previous research, the most frequent types of clergy CSA were forcing to petting, masturbation, or oral sex (Isely et al., 2008), which relates prevalingly to young boys at the age of 11–15 (Gold, 2000, 2008; Frawley-O’Dea, 2004). The permanent consequences on the victims- apart from the physical and psychological damage

or the misunderstanding of family and Church community -include the loosing of faith (Ganje-Fling&McCarthy, 1996, p. 22; Allred, 2015, p. 4; Rossetti, 1995, p. 1478–1479). Some victims even perceive their injury as “caused by God himself” (Farrell, 2009, p. 39). As with children who are sexually abused within the family, it is difficult for clerical CSA victims to disclose themselves. Instead, the victim suppresses her/his anger and transforms it to the “shared secret” (Augustyn, 2003, p. 17), which may be reported after *decades*.

## Theoretical background and state of research

### Roots of clergy CSA

The phenomenon of clergy CSA is very old, although it has been simplified as the problem of last 60 years, “American”, “Irish” or basically “Western” *sin* (and not yet *crime*) spreading itself to other countries, the problem of few individuals (“few-bad-apples in the basket” theory; Boston Globe, 2016), or of bad post-conciliar theology (Pope John Paul II, 2002a; Benedict XVI, 2019). There are plenty of notions about its risks: in updated Church documents<sup>1</sup>, the early Christian literature<sup>2</sup> and works of Church Fathers<sup>3</sup>, from Elvira council in 305–306 (Farrell, 2009), the appeal *Book of Gomorahof* St Peter Damian sent to Pope Leo IX in the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>, or the statement of Council of Trent (1545–1563), relating to the sad fact

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1 Catechism of Catholic Church, 1993 (par. 2389); Code of Canon Law, 1983 (Canon 84; Canon 277, par. 1–2; Canon XVIII; or Canon LXXI, which stipulated “clerics committing sexual sins” and “those who sexually abuse boys” are threatened with “irrevocable exclusion”, thus they not receive communion even at the time of death. Additionally, e.g. Canon 1395 (par. 1–2) describes the offense of child abuse, which is characteristic by obsessive, repetitive, secretive, and manipulative behaviour.

2 Didache, 96 (2, par. 2); Sipe, 1995, p. 10

3 Abba Isaac warned “do not bring young boys here [into the community]”, and Abba Carion and St. Benedict recommended to “let the light lit even in the night” (cit. from Podles, 2007, p. 17). There was also implication “not to harm youth”, and St. Basil stated: “A cleric or monk who seduces youths or young boys... is to be publicly flogged... For six months he will languish in prison-like confinement... and he shall never again associate with youths in private conversation, nor in counselling them” (cited from Allen, 2004, p. 232).

4 “Vice against nature creeps in like a cancer and even touches the ordered of consecrated men... unless the strength [of the church leaderships] intervenes as soon as possible” (cit. from Allen, 2004, p. 231).

that even pontiffs had sexual interactions with children (Sipe, 1995). From all that it can be concluded that the Church had already been aware of the devastating effects of clergy CSA and ordained the prevention and punishments. Nevertheless, its history of “irrevocable exclusion” is debatable (Farrell, 2009, p. 47).

Abuse of authority is commonly identified as the root of clergy CSA, in Church environment called *clericalism* (Faggioli, 2017; Carroll, 2015), and represented by “narcissism” or “arrogance” (Rhoderick, 2017, p. 190, 196), “elitism” (Gaillardetz, 2013, p. 2–3; Doyle, 2006) or “ecclesial pathology” (Cozzens, 2003). Common is the archetype of religious “guru” or preacher of high reputation. Such priests who offended justify themselves as *unable to err* (Allred, 2015, p. 13); they are convinced of their “nonaccountability” (Cartagenas, 2011) and blame victims instead (Ormerod, 1995, p. 34). Besides the Church environment there were already described broader risk factors for committing CSA like social deficits, sexual problems, deviant attitudes/beliefs, or criminal problems (Whitaker et al., 2008).

The phenomenon of CSA within the Catholic Church attracted greater public attention in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with the liberalization of speech about this shameful and tabooed topic in media<sup>5</sup> and with women’s and children’s protection movement. The concept of *being the victim* or – in some context – *survivor* of clergy CSA changed dramatically, and what might have been silenced in history would not have been possible to silence in the present and the future. One of the indicators of the change is, for example, the testimonies of religious women about abuse in Church (Scaraffia, 2019).

Apart from clergy CSA itself, there is a massive problem of its cover-up. Among the most visible historical uncovering of the internal protection system of shielding the accused priests, transferring them, and muffling

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5 The first publicly known crimes were perpetrated by F. Gilbert Gauthé of the diocese of Lafayette in Louisiana (in the years 1983–1984); then it was investigated the older cause of F. James Porter from the diocese of Falls River in Massachusetts active in 1960–1972 even sadistically (Terry et al., 2011). Both are well-known as exemplary sexual predators. Later on, there were investigated older causes from El Paso, Iowa, Newfoundland or New Mexico. For today there are yet unfinished cases in Philadelphia, Kansas City, and Pennsylvania (only in US). Since 1950, thousands of children were molested by priests in US (Podles, 2007, p. 239) and until 2002, 300 priests had been globally taken off duty over abuse allegations (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004). The most cases came from 80’s and 90’, while since then the numbers are lowering (Terry et al., 2011), which reason lies in the decline of priests, lowering of the requirements in the seminaries and accepting immature candidates.

the victims with discreet financial settlements is the work of *Boston Globe's* investigative team Spotlight (Caroll et al., 2002).<sup>6</sup>

Among the best covered publications to the topic belong, apart from Podles<sup>7</sup> and Farrell's<sup>8</sup>, are those of Berry (1992) and Bruni with Burkett (1993).<sup>9</sup> From some point of view, by celibacy "ironic by-product" was made: "tolerance of clergy homosexuality" (Martel, 2019, p. xxii). Based on 1,500 interviews with clergy, the author claims that the prevailing reason for the cover-up of CSA in Church is the fact that those members of clergy who are gay are exploiting each other with discrete and compromising information, for example, about their relationships (which conflict with their promise to live in celibacy). As aside consequence, because of that omnipresent corruption the victims are not being listened to. And as other authors state, after 25 years of interviews, circa 50 % of priest do not in fact live in celibacy (Sipe, 1995, p. 61).

## Francis' reforms tracing Vatican II

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, elected pope by conclave in 2013, chose the name Francis – as the first pope in history. He might have been inspired by Francis of Assisi, middle age saint and Church reformer. Specifically, he

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- 6 Since Boston's causes, Pope John Paul II and, after him, Benedict XVI had to cope administratively and medially with those sad facts. Pope Benedict XVI, a "weak governor and a poor politician", who's leadership was a "series of ill-drafted judgments and PR disasters" (Vallely, 2013, p. 7), was actually the very first pontiff who apologized to the victims and received them personally in 2001 during his visit to USA. His steps included speeding up of the trials of abusers, especially the case of Gino Burresi in 2002 Vatican investigation, or of Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of Legionaries of Christ investigated by Msgr. Charles Scicluna (Podles, 2007, p. 516).
  - 7 Podles emphasizes strongly that clergy CSA is about homosexuality, not pedophilia (2007, p. 3), and that it is *not* problem of celibacy; he concludes, that the opinion orientation (liberal or conservative) is *not* the most important indicator for clergy CSA (ibid, p. 9).
  - 8 Farrell focused on the history of clergy CSA and made a practical research about how people usually react to the information about it.
  - 9 Berry clearly states that clergy CSA has to do with "clerical culture, not human sexuality per se" (1992, p. xii). For roots of this culture we may look for on the pontificate of Pope Gregory VI, author of the command of obligatory celibacy. Indeed, apart from care about wealth motivation, there were also more positive reasons for life in celibacy such as "refuge against stereotypical man and woman roles" (Cozzens, 2003, p. 98).

might have been inspired by words believed in Church as revealed to the saint by God himself: “Francis, don’t you see that my house is being destroyed? Go, then, and rebuild it for me” (Leo et al., 2013).<sup>10</sup> Now, in the middle of the current scandal of clergy CSA (Maier, 2016) and witnessing this phenomenon on all continents, cultures, and social levels, time came for Church to “repair the house” also in this sense. Francis was sure that, to deal with the crisis right, neither Donatists<sup>11</sup> nor rigorists<sup>12</sup> have the right solutions, because they are too obsessed by the *power of law* (Ivereigh, 2019, p. 321). “While conservatives blamed a failure of discipline and orthodoxy and progressives pointed to an authoritarian ecclesiastical culture, Francis wanted to keep the focus on diabolic corruption [clericalism]” (ibid., p. 319).

Unlike other institutions, the Church is inherently built on communication (Eilers, 2009) and, paradoxically, struggles with democratization of information ever since Gutenberg’s breakthrough invention (Geybels et al., 2009, p. 17). Additionally, large institutions usually do not like to change, and they only do so when forced from outside.<sup>13</sup> Lack of transparency may today cause big criticism (Vedrashko, 2015, p. 1). Originally, Church was hostile to media development of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

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- 10 The friar of Assisi may have to be asked by God himself to help repair the world: to resist the violence of crusades, to build trust through dialogue and encounter, and to honour all creatures as God’s gifts.
  - 11 Christian sect from 4–5<sup>th</sup> centuries, which argued that clergy must be faultless for sacraments to be valid. They are named after bishop Donatus Magnus.
  - 12 In August 2018, the bombshell “Testimony” dropped by a former apostolic nuncio in the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, and published during the night by several conservative American and Italian media trying to force Francis to resign stunned all the world. The critique of cleric’s activity appeared instantly: “Can one archbishop be prosecutor, judge and jury and call for a resignation of the pope?” (CNA, 2018) Here Towey cited the 1990 instruction *Donum veritatis* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which advised theologians against turning to the media when they have tensions with the Magisterium. The document explains that all Catholics must practise “submission of the will and intellect” to what the pope teaches and that theologians, while they may disagree, must never do so in public.
  - 13 As the author states (p. 7), the societal pressure may be both direct (e.g., investigative journalism) and indirect (increasing demand for transparency of religious institutions – e.g., to move from secrecy to candour, from hierarchies to networks, from one-to-many to many-to-many communication, from receiving to participating, from surveillance to surveillance etc.).
  - 14 This is obvious with the anti-modernist popes Pius X and Pius XI But very soon after the situation changed with Vatican Radio based in 1931 (Sultana, 2014, p. 204).

Then, her intention was substantially formed by outcomes of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), symbolic end of the “fortress Catholicism” and shift from “institution turned inwards” to “greater interaction with, and influence on, secular society” (Vallely 2013, p. 33). The Church subsequently related to the ethical work of media in several magisterial documents.<sup>15</sup> The commitments to communicate honestly are situated in the core of the Vatican media reform as well (Francis, 2016b; Vatican News, 2017; etc.). Also, the decisive public speech of Pope Francis is visible in recent years.<sup>16</sup>

According to this, it seems that, although the Church had initially denied transparency, it later turned to enable information disclosure.<sup>17</sup> Those activities demonstrate the Church’s interest in maintaining its credibility by compromising its secrecy. However, the current example of the diocese of Cologne – among others – shows that this transparency in processing is not yet guaranteed everywhere (Deutschlandfunk, 2021). A lot needs to be done before the Church’s information policy can be called transparent. Indeed, many reforms – apart from that most visible (liturgical one) – had not been adopted yet since Second Vatican Council.<sup>18</sup> As initiation of the overall reform, Francis appointed the nine-member Council of Cardinal Advisers (C9, now rather “C6”) in 2013 to help him.<sup>19</sup>

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15 Miranda Prorsus, 1957; *Inter mirifica*, 1963; *Communio et Progressio*, 1971; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975; *Aetatis Novae*, 1992; *Il Rapido Sviluppo*, 2005, etc.

16 *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013; *People discarded*, 2016; *Meeting with the executive committee of CELAM in Colombia*, 2017; *Letter to the People of God*, 2018; *Meeting “The protection of minors in the church”*, 2019; etc.

17 Subsequently, documents regarding the abuse cases (e.g., instruction “*Crimen sollicitationis*” from 1962) have been published on the Holy See’s website [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), working from 1995.

18 That was to the big extent caused by the fact that the finisher of the council, Pope Paul VI, left four important topics (celibacy, birth-control and contraception, collegiality of bishops, and (!) the reform of the Roman Curia) in his charge and thus *got round* the council in fact. Thus, some theologians concluded that neither John XXIII nor Paul VI had real willingness to the certain changes which led to the strengthening of the centralisation elements (Petráček, 2016, p. 141). According to Reese (1998, p. 12), Pope John Paul II as the first started to act as real Rome bishop. Despite the growing centralization under his leadership, he was author of forces to more collegial forms of organization (*ibid*, p. 30), such as establishment of the College of Cardinals. Unfortunately, he was careful never to repudiate the words of Vatican II, but he worked to empty them of the extrovert spirit.

19 These Cardinals have never worked in Curia before, but all share a fierce experience of running dioceses in all the world. There stays the question whether this structural revolution “may be reversed by the next pope” and whether the “C6”

The common style of the Vatican communications used to be described as “bellafigura” by insiders, thus, to keep certain things hidden. „Obviously, it is a principle open to abuse” (Allen, 2004, p. 102). Contrary, through last years, Francis converted it to “bruttafigura” (Ivereigh, 2019, p. 50) and soon became an “icon of simplicity and humility” who is self-conscious of his own hundreds of errors confessed publicly (Valley, 2013, p. xviii). Francis’ consistent approach clearly confirmed the preceding empirical studies of the clergy CSA; he labelled excessive clericalism “ecclesial challenge” (Evangelii Gaudium 2013, par. 102), because it is not only individual but always has something in common with the *theology behind* that mentality (Rhoderick, 2017, p. 190).

For Pope Francis’ critics, the situation looks different; they blame post-conciliar development for corruption, heterodoxy, or even “sexual-liturgical-moral abuse intertwining” (Lawler 2018, p. 3). The opinions on crisis itself are strongly polarized from the 90s. The upper mentioned inspiration by St Francis’ way probably has much broader implications.<sup>20</sup> Now after six years of gradual reform of Vatican communications, discussions show the first possible results of this reform. The Secretariat for Communication (later renamed Dicastery) was established by Pope Francis in 2015 as the part of Curia. Its development indicates that the reform is not only of technological nature (unification of disparate Vatican media outlets) but is also a reform in terms of content (faithfulness to the Christian mission, ethical and professional standards). The media segment of Curia was Francis’ priority and should serve as the pattern for the overall reform. The theme of the Vatican communications became highly socially relevant in 2018, “annus horribilis” (Ivereigh, 2019), when a lot of previous abuse scandals came to light *again* and short after Pope’s apostolic visit to Chile, where he dramatically underestimated the seriousness of the situation.

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is the real “embryo of a new system”, because Francis still seems to love “both collegiality and the power of decision-making” (Franco, 2013, p. 116). Alternatively, his view of reform is about process, not outcomes (Valley, 2016, p. 4).

- 20 The more time passes since Vatican II, the more important may the interpretation of the council get. Therefore, we shall “move beyond loaded labels like conservative/reactionary and progressive/liberal” (O’Malley, 2010, p. 312). Since the beginning of the pontificate of Francis, such “contraposition vanished from the horizon and [it] became clear that the real choice is between reform and restoration” (Hellemans & Jonkers, 2018, p. 17).

## This study

As the state of research has shown and due to the current public debate on the topic of CSA within the Church, this environment is increasingly forced to deal with this topic. This includes, among other, the handling and reappraisal to communicate clergy CSA also publicly and medially. However, it has become apparent in recent years that the Church does not have the transparency in its public communication that it needs. Therefore, the inquiry question arises: To what extent do news about CSA produced by the official *Vatican News* differ from those published by Catholic media that are not published by the Vatican and neither by local Church? For this reason, the current study examines how the Vatican officially communicates about clergy CSA in comparison to non-Vatican Catholic media.

## Methods

### Procedure

A quantitative content analysis of the official online Vatican media channel (*Vatican News*, further VN) and an independent American website (*Crux Now*, CN) in the period 21–24 February of years 2013–2020 was conducted. The period was defined to compare media content of four days, when, in 2019, the extraordinary summit “Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church” occurred.<sup>21</sup> The inclusion criteria for the selected articles was topic (main or side) of clergy CSA, which was considered according to the keyword “abuse” (when the article finally did not relate to clergy CSA, it was removed from the sample). Totally, it was a sample

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21 For the February 2019, Pope gathered the extraordinary summit in Vatican, where all the presidents of the world bishop conferences, religious, laics, and survivors discussed the concrete possibilities of the future development (*Meeting on The Protection of Minors in the Church*, 2019). On the summit, the Pope concretized the fight against abuse in eight points: the protection of children; impeccable seriousness; genuine purification; formation; strengthening and reviewing guidelines by bishop conferences; accompaniment of those who have been abused; protection in the digital world; and fighting against sexual tourism. Continuously, he appealed to leave behind the idea of needing to protect the institution’s good name rather than the good of persons (Francis, 2019).



of 118 articles in both media. This sample was analyzed according to six categories.

### Category system

The selected articles were coded according to six categories: medium (CN or VN), main topic (e.g., prevention, denying, causes), country of the event (e.g., US, Vatican, Church in general), authority who gives the key information (e.g., Pope, juries, activists), photo subject (e.g., victims, bishops, illustrative), and genre (e.g., piece of news, analysis).

### Materials

*Crux Now* (CN) understands its mission as „offering the very best in smart, wired and independent coverage of the Vatican and the Catholic Church” (Crux Now, n. d.). It was founded as a project of *The Boston Globe* in 2014 but has been fully independent since March 2016. This source was chosen for this case study because of its origin from below and activist character. Since 2014, it is led by experienced Vatican correspondent John A. Allen. The small team of journalists encompasses Argentinian correspondent Inés San Martín, former employee of Vatican radio Charles Collins, the correspondents Christopher White, Elise Ann Allen and Nirmala Carvalho (from India), and priest Jeff Kirby.

*Vatican News* (VN) is the online information service of Dicastery for Communication provided since 2016, now in 39 national sections. It is divided into four thematic sections (Pope, Vatican, Church and World). Apart from the informative mission, its ambition is to “provide key to interpretation” (Vatican News, n. d.). Its content is the collaborative work of 28 authors, mainly Robin Gomez, Sr. Bernadette Mary Reis, Linda Bordoni, Christopher Wells, and editorial chief Andrea Torielli.

## Results

### Descriptive results

From the total of 118 articles, 70 % ( $n = 83$ ) were published in CN and 30 % ( $n = 35$ ) in VN. More than half of all CN articles, 59 % ( $n = 49$ ) are from

2019, thus from summit. Similarly, in VN, there was the highest number from 2019, which is 89 % ( $n = 31$ ). The tendency to medialize the topic of clergy CSA seems to decline before the summit and after it as well in both media; there were altogether 17 % ( $n = 20$ ) texts in 2020, 7 % ( $n = 8$ ) in 2018, 3 % ( $n = 4$ ) in 2017, 2 % ( $n = 2$ ) in 2016, and none in 2015 and 2014, when CN started to be issued. Similarly, in VN, there were published only 6 % ( $n = 2$ ) articles in 2020 and as well 6 % ( $n = 2$ ) in 2018.

To address the categories, there are altogether covered 16 countries, although 51 % ( $n = 60$ ) of the analyzed texts refer to the global Church in general.

Considering whose authority is dominant in the CSA news item, Cardinals, bishops or dioceses were represented in most cases, that is 30 % ( $n = 35$ ), as well as Pope, Vatican, Pontifical Commission, etc. with 30 % ( $n = 35$ ), then several levels of courts, commissions, juries, etc. with 14 % ( $n = 16$ ), then activists, psychotherapists, or journalists with 11 % ( $n = 13$ ), victims and survivors with 9 % ( $n = 11$ ), and in 7 % ( $n = 8$ ) it is other or left undecided. It is noteworthy that courts, commissions, and juries find place exclusively in CN, while VN refers to Pope and Cardinals in 77 % of the articles. All but two articles in which victims resp. survivors got to speak were published in CN.

From the comparison of the newscast in VN and CN emerges that the approach differs regarding the authority mentioned. The category of Cardinals, bishops or dioceses was identified in 40 % ( $n = 14$ ) in VN, whereas in 25 % ( $n = 21$ ) in CN. As for the Pope, Vatican, and Pontifical Commission category, it was identified in 37 % ( $n = 13$ ) in VN in comparison to 27 % ( $n = 22$ ) in CN. Stronger difference is visible in the category Courts, commissions, and juries, which is not appearing in the newscast of VN at all ( $n = 0$ ), whereas in 19 % ( $n = 16$ ) in CN. Very similar numbers are to be found in the category of activists, psychotherapists, and journalists, which is covered by 14 % ( $n = 5$ ) in VN and 10 % ( $n = 8$ ) in CN. Victims and survivors appear as the category in 6 % ( $n = 2$ ) in VN, whereas in 11 % ( $n = 9$ ) in CN. Other cases are summed up under 3 % ( $n = 1$ ) in VN and 8 % ( $n = 7$ ) in CN.

Among all analyzed articles, photos prevail illustrative 20 % ( $n = 24$ ), images of Pope alone or with bishops 13 % ( $n = 15$ ), from summit 8 % ( $n = 10$ ), or of victims 6 % ( $n = 7$ ). The rest was categorized as “other” with 53 % ( $n = 62$ ).

There is present a wide range of journalistic genres with piece of news leading in 69 % ( $n = 81$ ), then commented speech in 16 % ( $n = 19$ ), and CN’s John Allen’s analysis in 3 % ( $n = 4$ ); 12 % ( $n = 14$ ) where coded as “others”.

## Main topic

Turning to the topics in depth, one of the most interesting groups of main topics is summed under “change of paradigm” in the relation to clergy CSA and its dealing in 15 % ( $n = 18$ ). There’s the tendency to interpret this “change” differently in CN ( $n = 10$ ) and VN ( $n = 8$ ). Into CN’s vision belong examples like “culture of disclosure” or “international cooperation”, emphasizing that CSA is not a “Western problem” and the “cultural difference [is] no reason”, whereas in VN clerical language plays a bigger role – episcopal collegiality, synodality, accountability accessible through communion, or the urgency “to name the evil”. A detailed distribution can be found in table 1.

Another notable section with 12 % ( $n = 14$ ) is summed up unto “causes” – the allegations of CSA, the court already running, or the sentencing of the perpetrator. The majority of these 14 articles were published in 2020 and 2019. All but one was published in CN. No single cause quickly asserts itself there. Specifically, the CSA accusations against Cardinal Pell had only two articles, same as the accusations against Jean Vanier for sexual abuse in L’Arche community.

A significant number of articles (10 %;  $n = 12$ ) was related to some form of criticism. All but two from these 12 articles were published in CN. As one article claims, journalists were the “worst enemies” for bishops who continue to cover-up of clergy CSA; another article regrets that parents of victims were not invited to the Vatican summit. Three articles relate to the cultural situation in Africa, where still many cases are perpetuated without adequate notion. Three articles are directly criticizing Pope Francis for his negligence to meet victims in his Mexico trip or for his dealing with the situation in Peru and; one article even claims dealing with clerical CSA is “not priority” of his pontificate

Ten articles support Pope Francis and sum up the Vatican actions. Their majority ( $n = 9$ ) was published in CN and refers to establishing of a “task force”, abolishing pontifical secret, or earlier Pope’s reduction of sanctions for abusive priests for which he was criticized. Concretely, there are to find seven articles concerning Archbishop Scicluna’s visitation in Chile -from his meeting with victims and his hospitalization up to his testifying of charged abuser Barros.

Six articles can be summed up under the topic “spiritual”. Their aims are rather to appeal to the inner processes than to practical measures (prevention). Notably, they were all published in VN. The representatives of this genre are the concluding speeches delivered by Pope Francis on the summit or his penitential service’s speech. Among the other content

Table 1  
*Proportions of articles by main topic and authority*

	Number of articles		VN		CN		
	Total	In percent	Number of articles per source		Total	In percent of articles in CN	
			of all articles	In percent of articles in VN			of all articles
All articles	118	100%	35	30%	83	70%	100%
Main topic							
Change of paradigm	18	15%	8	7%	10	8%	12%
Causes	14	12%	1	1%	13	11%	16%
Criticism	12	10%	2	2%	10	8%	12%
Support of Pope Francis	10	8%	1	1%	9	8%	11%
Spiritual	6	5%	6	5%	0	0%	0%
Theology of victims	6	5%	5	4%	1	1%	1%
Prevention	3	3%	0	0%	3	3%	4%
Denying and trivialization	2	2%	2	2%	0	0%	0%
Polish statue down	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%	2%
Role of laity	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0%
Other	44	37%	9	8%	35	30%	42%
Authority							
Cardinals, bishops, ordiocoesses	35	30%	14	12%	21	18%	25%
Pope, Vatican, Pontifical Commission	35	30%	13	11%	22	19%	27%
Courts, commissions, juries	16	14%	0	0%	16	14%	19%
Activists, psychotherapists, journalists	13	11%	5	4%	8	7%	10%
Victims, survivors	11	9%	2	2%	9	8%	11%
Other	8	7%	1	1%	7	6%	8%

belong summit speeches of bishops from different countries ( $n = 3$ ): Filipino Cardinal Tagle's speech on solidarity with victims or Scicluna's resolution on deal with the abuse "at all costs". These were covered only by VN. There also came the evaluation of summit's contribution in the year after (in 2020;  $n = 5$ ). Occasionally, there appeared appeal for bigger progress.

Another category was "theology of victims" – resp. survivors – representing 5% ( $n = 6$ ). All but one of those articles were published in VN. This approach takes victims as "Christ crucified", appeals to "hear their cry" and "to feel their wound as [our] vulnerability", or invalidates the stereotype that victims are "guilty of [too long] silence".

Other relevant topics were "prevention" with only three articles (all in CN), "role of laity" ( $n = 1$ ) as well as victims' testimonies at summit ( $n = 1$ ). Two articles were found to deny and trivialize the situation. The local but symbolical occasion of pulling down the statue of a Polish abuser found its place in two articles in CN.

## Discussion

Now follows the comparison of the two media. *Crux Now* generally concentrates on the topic of CSA more frequently and in a more practical or procedural way, whereas *Vatican News* pays attention to its spiritual part, "theology of victims", and to the fact that rule of law has not always the final word. More specifically, into CN's vision belong examples like "culture of disclosure" or "international cooperation", emphasizing that CSA is not a "Western problem" and the "cultural difference [is] no reason", whereas in VN's articles more clerical language plays role – episcopal collegiality, synodality, accountability accessible through communion, or the urgency to "to name the evil".

CN and VN demonstrably examine the issue of clergy CSA differently and give it different amounts of attention. A reason for this may lie in the fact who are owners of that media. Whereas the establisher of VN – the Vatican Secretariat for Communication – is part of the clumsy and fossilized Roman Curia, struggling now to reform itself under Pope Francis' authority, the history of CN is more dynamic. It was founded as a project of *The Boston Globe* in 2014, after the massive scandal of clergy CSA in US was investigated by *Spotlight* journalistic team of the aforementioned newspaper. Subsequently CN did not stop to follow the cases of CSA, and step by step it became the respected and credible source of online information about Catholic Church in US, but also internationally, with

detailed but not sensationalist analysis of cases of CSA. The willingness to report about the cases constantly and with the ambition to stay faithful (but not servile) to the Catholic identity brings the living pulse, and so it stays attractive for the audience.

As was already elaborated in the theoretical part, the Catholic Church is facing the pressure to be more transparent (Vedrashko, 2015). The Vatican media reform is a unique way how to adapt on the standards under the lead of Pope Francis (Francis, 2016b; Vatican News, 2017). It is possible already to see its impact: The issue of clergy CSA became a frequent topic of the news – at least in comparison to the history of Vatican media. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in the completeness and overall quality of reporting about clergy CSA, just as it is the case in non-church media, which primarily cover the topic on an occasion-related basis and not very preventively (Kitzinger, 2004; Popović, 2018). Only with this strategy can the Church ever meet Jesus' expectation: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

This inquiry is surely limited by its fixed length, which had to be reduced significantly. Another limitation is represented by the concentration solely on those four days of every year of the years 2013–2020. A broader scope would enable greater understanding of the context and long-lasting trends in Catholic media – both official and independent. Results of the study are not generalizable, because the study has an exploratory character. The used method has its shortcomings as it analyzes, rephrases, and categorizes texts and therefore loses the articles' complexity and details in the process.

## Conclusion

The case study identifies how VN and CN inform about clergy CSA. From analyzed data it may be concluded that the year 2019 represents the clear high peak of pushing agenda of clergy CSA forward, which must be considered as a disappointment. As already assumed in discussion, the clerical language, prevailing in *Vatican News*, has to be considered the huge risk, whereas the chance the Church can enable is the way of holistic healing ("theology of victims"), not only the successful court process with criminals. The Catholic Church may benefit from this open, transparent, and deeply authentic approach a lot. To do so, however, it must have the courage to state clearly what is wrong at the core of the Church system.

## Funding

The realisation of the chapter was financially supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (“GAUK”).

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