



The Relevance of John Paul II's Theology of the Body in Addressing the Crisis of Understanding Body and Sexuality in the Era of Social-Media

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ABSTRACT

The digital era triggers an anthropology crisis of the body. This is marked by the emergence of views on the objectification of the body and the commodification of sexuality, where the human body is reduced to an object of consumption and exploitation. Phenomena such as pornography, body image culture, and unrealistic beauty standards obscure the spiritual meaning of the body as a divine creation. These issues lead to a degradation of understanding regarding the values of marriage, sexuality, and human relationships. This study aims to examine the relevance of John Paul II's Theology of the Body as a solution to these phenomena. John Paul II's teachings, rooted in a profound reflection on the Scriptures, position the body as a medium for revealing love and self-giving. The body is not merely understood as a biological reality but also as a spiritual and transcendent dimension that reflects God's love. Through concepts such as the spousal meaning of the body and humanity's call to live in purity of heart, the Theology of the Body offers a holistic and profound perspective on the body, sexuality, and human relationships. This study employs a literature review method, analyzing 129 catecheses of John Paul II alongside various modern social phenomena. The findings demonstrate that the Theology of the Body restores the dignity of the human body by opposing objectification and exploitation while promoting loving relationships that are dignified and sacred. By understanding the body as a sacrament of love that reflects the human identity as God's image, John Paul II's Theology of the Body serves not only as a theological solution but also as a practical response to social, cultural, and moral challenges in the modern era.

ABSTRAK

Era digital memicu krisis antropologi tubuh. Hal ini ditandai dengan munculnya pandangan tentang objektifikasi tubuh dan komodifikasi seksualitas, di mana tubuh manusia direduksi menjadi objek konsumsi dan eksploitasi. Fenomena seperti pornografi, budaya body image, dan standar kecantikan yang tidak realistis mengaburkan makna spiritual tubuh sebagai ciptaan ilahi. Hal ini mengakibatkan adanya degradasi terhadap pemahaman akan nilai pernikahan, seksualitas, dan relasi manusia. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji relevansi Teologi Tubuh Yohanes Paulus II sebagai solusi terhadap fenomena yang terjadi ini. Ajaran Yohanes Paulus II, yang berakar pada refleksi mendalam atas Kitab Suci, menempatkan tubuh sebagai sarana pewahyuan kasih dan pemberian diri. Tubuh tidak hanya dipahami sebagai realitas biologis, tetapi juga memiliki dimensi spiritual dan transenden yang mencerminkan kasih Allah. Melalui konsep seperti spousal meaning of the body dan panggilan manusia untuk hidup dalam kemurnian hati, Teologi Tubuh menawarkan pandangan yang holistik dan mendalam tentang tubuh, seksualitas, dan relasi manusia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kajian pustaka dengan menganalisis 129 katekese Yohanes Paulus II dan berbagai fenomena sosial modern yang terjadi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Teologi Tubuh mampu memulihkan martabat tubuh manusia dengan melawan objektifikasi dan eksploitasi, serta mempromosikan relasi kasih yang bermartabat dan sakral. Dengan memahami tubuh sebagai sakramen kasih yang mencerminkan identitas manusia sebagai citra Allah, Teologi Tubuh Yohanes Paulus II tidak hanya menjadi solusi teologis tetapi juga praktis dalam menghadapi tantangan sosial, budaya, dan moral di era modern ini.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, social phenomena related to the body, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships have undergone significant changes (Saheed, 2023). These developments are partly the result of globalization, secularization, and advancements in digital technology (Haq & Sen, 2021; Setia & Haq, 2023; Ziaul Haq et al., 2023). The increasing freedom of individuals to express their sexual identities, issues of gender, and shifting meanings of marriage and family have become major focal points (Brownell & Besnier, 2020). Changes in technology, globalization, and cultural values have given rise to phenomena that reflect a crisis in the anthropology of the body. The shift in values within global society has created an anthropological crisis where the human body is understood solely in materialistic and instrumental terms (Van Driel, 2020). In this crisis, the

human body has lost its profound spiritual and sacred meaning. However, in many parts of the world, modernity does not necessarily equate to the exclusion of spiritual and sacred significance (Gore, 2022). Moreover, the mental-spiritual dimension remains crucial in human existence, and ignoring this aspect is an unscientific approach (Haq et al., 2024).

The phenomenon of objectification of the body and sexuality has intensified with the advent of social media (Ward et al., 2023). Body objectification, particularly of women, has escalated in the social media era. Understanding the human body and sexuality has undergone significant shifts (Brasil et al., 2024). Social media, advertisements, and the entertainment industry often reduce the human body to a consumable object. The beauty, fashion, and digital technology industries treat the body as a consumable asset (Harren et al., 2021). Through social media and entertainment, the human body is increasingly commodified and exploited. This perception often disregards the spiritual and intrinsic meanings of the body, focusing solely on physical appearance.

This phenomenon is evident in the “body image” culture promoted through visual media, which has created narrow and often harmful beauty standards that negatively impact individuals' mental health, particularly among young people (Wanniarachchi et al., 2022). Platforms like Instagram and TikTok frequently propagate unrealistic standards. Research by the *Royal Society for Public Health* (RSPH) in the United Kingdom revealed that 91% of women aged 16–25 feel dissatisfied with their bodies due to social media's influence (Richards et al., 2022).

The unrealistic “body image” culture fosters dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, pushing individuals toward manipulative behaviors, such as plastic surgery or even the use of AI technologies. These behaviors further amplify physical and sexual exploitation of the body (Arymami, 2023). This trend stems from digital existence demands and content commodification, where body exploitation becomes part of the digital economy trend (influencers and endorsements). Using the body as a marketing tool (commodification) perpetuates the belief that a person's value lies solely in their physical appearance (Setia et al., 2021).

Consumer culture and the digital revolution have fueled the objectification of the body and the commodification of sexuality (Kucuk, 2016). The human body, particularly women's bodies, is often reduced to objects that serve visual and economic interests. Sexuality has become a commodity in popular culture and the global economy. This practice not only reduces the human body to a consumable object but also shapes societal perceptions of the body's role and sexuality in the community (Raharjo, 1997).

Sexuality is increasingly detached from the meanings of love and procreation, often viewed merely as a means of physical pleasure. Sexuality is frequently removed from its context of love and fertility. Phenomena like pornography, digital prostitution, and hook-up culture (dating activities without formal or committed relationships) create realities where sexuality loses its sacramental value, ultimately diminishing the dignity of the human body (Winter et al., 2020). This trend has led to a crisis in marriage and family institutions. Research has shown that increasing divorce rates and declining commitment to marriage institutions result from a moral value crisis and modern materialism (Rahmah, 2023). High divorce rates, declining marriage rates, and a rise in cohabitation outside marriage indirectly reflect the erosion of commitment and family unity as a “community of love.” This trend indicates a loss of understanding of marriage as a sacred commitment between a man and a woman. The crisis triggers the degradation of family values and redefines the role of the body in sexual relationships and marital commitment.

These phenomena raise fundamental questions: Does the human body have a deeper meaning beyond its physical reality? This issue underscores the urgency to reflect on the meaning of the human body, sexual relationships, and the value of marriage through a comprehensive and

spiritual perspective. This anthropological crisis calls for deep reflection on the meaning of the human body, sexuality, and the role of the body in interpersonal relationships (Vendemia et al., 2021).

In this context, John Paul II's Theology of the Body offers a spiritual framework capable of addressing this crisis through the restoration of the body's dignity and a renewed understanding of human sexuality. John Paul II's Theology of the Body provides a significant contribution toward reconstructing a holistic understanding of the human body, encompassing its physical, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. The Theology of the Body, articulated by Pope John Paul II in 129 catecheses during general audiences between 1979 and 1984, presents a revolutionary approach to understanding the human body (Harrington & Keenan, 2023). This teaching is rooted in Scripture, particularly in deep reflections on Genesis, the Gospel of Matthew, and Paul's epistles, interpreting the body as a means of expressing love and self-giving in light of God's plan.

Existing studies on John Paul II's Theology of the Body have contributed significantly to the discourse. For instance, Waldstein (2006) provides the original texts of the 129 catecheses along with analysis. However, Waldstein's research remains textual and does not deeply connect these teachings to modern phenomena, such as the digital era's body exploitation or gender ideology. Christopher West (2007; 2009) simplifies the Theology of the Body for lay audiences, yet his approach often leans toward practical applications and does not sufficiently address complex theoretical issues regarding sexual identity crises and bioethics. Healy (2005) explores the sacramental dimension of marriage within the Theology of the Body but does not extend this analysis to contemporary social issues, such as the decline of family values or technology's role in human relationships. While prior research emphasizes theological and spiritual aspects, there is a noticeable gap in connecting John Paul II's Theology of the Body to modern challenges, including body objectification in the digital age, the consumer culture of sexuality, and the marriage and family crisis.

This study adopts a critical approach to modern phenomena grounded in spiritual and anthropological perspectives, bridging the crisis of body understanding through profound theological reflection. This research examines the concepts of the body, sexuality, and love within John Paul II's Theology of the Body as a response to the modern anthropological crisis. It identifies the relevance of this teaching in addressing body objectification and sexuality commodification and proposes a theology- and ethics-based model of understanding the body to foster healthier, more dignified, and sacred human relationships. In essence, this study integrates John Paul II's Theology of the Body into the context of contemporary social challenges, such as sexual identity confusion, body objectification in digital media, and the diminishing sacredness of marriage.

John Paul II's Theology of the Body holds profound relevance in addressing the crisis of understanding the human body in the modern era. This teaching interprets the human body not merely as a biological entity but as a means of expressing love, openness to life, and participation in God's salvific plan (Butler & Evert, 2016). The body possesses the capacity to reflect love that is total, free, faithful, and fruitful. Restoring the meaning of the body through theological perspectives offers solutions to objectification, exploitation, and the fragmentation of human identity. John Paul II's teachings create a dialogue between theology and modern cultural challenges, providing comprehensive and practical solutions.

This research positions John Paul II's Theology of the Body as a relevant and solution-oriented theological reflection on contemporary challenges. Its focus extends beyond spiritual understanding to developing practical frameworks for reconstructing the human body's meaning

aligned with divine dignity. By understanding the body and sexuality through a theological, anthropological lens, individuals can establish healthier, more dignified relationships in line with their created purpose. Purifying the body's meaning through theology fosters dignified relationships, avoids exploitation, and builds families as "communities of love." Thus, this research provides a robust theological foundation for understanding the body within the context of modern socio-cultural challenges while addressing research gaps in connecting John Paul II's Theology of the Body with current social phenomena.

Therefore, this research aims to examine the relevance of John Paul II's Theology of the Body as a solution to the objectification of the body and the commodification of sexuality in the modern era. This study analyzes the concepts of the body, sexuality, and love within the teachings of John Paul II's Theology of the Body as a response to the modern anthropological crisis and identifies the relevance of these teachings in addressing social phenomena such as body exploitation in digital media, declining marriage values, and sexual identity fragmentation. This approach seeks to develop a theology- and ethics-based model of understanding the body to foster healthier, more dignified, and sacred human relationships.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a literature review as the primary approach for collecting and analyzing data (Djunatan et al., 2024). The main focus of the study involves an in-depth analysis of the 129 catecheses of John Paul II on the Theology of the Body, delivered to general audiences between 1979 and 1984, documented in the book *The Redemption of the Body and Sacramentality of Marriage (Theology of the Body) From the Weekly Audiences of His Holiness September 5, 1979 – November 28, 1984*. The study also analyzes contemporary social phenomena, including body objectification, the commodification of sexuality, and the marriage crisis. The analysis incorporates several key resources, such as Michael Waldstein's *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (2006) and archives of general audiences available on the official Vatican website (<https://www.vatican.va>). Additional sources include books like Christopher West's *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's Man and Woman He Created Them* (2007) and *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (2009), Church documents such as Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) and Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), as well as other theological and sociological articles discussing the relevance of the Theology of the Body in a modern context.

Using a descriptive-analytical method, the author analyzes data by comparing the concept of the Theology of the Body with other perspectives on the body and sexuality found in theological, sociological, and cultural literature. The author examines social phenomena such as body objectification and the commodification of sexuality as realities that contrast with John Paul II's views. Furthermore, the research identifies the relevance and contribution of the Theology of the Body as both a conceptual and practical response to the moral value crisis in contemporary society.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Basic Concepts of John Paul II's Theology of the Body

The Theology of the Body has a long tradition and history within the Catholic Church. The Church Fathers and modern popes have contributed to theological perspectives on the body from various angles, even though they did not specifically refer to it as the Theology of the Body. John Paul II built upon his predecessors' teachings on the theology of the body. The Theology of the

Body comprises 129 catecheses delivered by Pope John Paul II during general audiences from 1979 to 1984. In these teachings, John Paul II addressed three main themes: the Original Unity and Nakedness of the Body in Creation, the meaning of the resurrection of the body and eternal life (eschatological hope), and the body as a place of the calling to authentic love (Paul II, 2005). Waldstein (2006) also divided John Paul II's teachings into three parts: *first*, The Body in God's Original Plan (Genesis 1–2), where the human body was created by God in original purity and endowed with profound spiritual value. *Second*, The Body in the State of Sin, where original sin caused a division between spirit and body, leading to objectification and the misuse of sexuality. *Third*, The Body in the Resurrection speaks of the complete restoration of the human body in the resurrection as the fulfillment of creation's purpose.

In these catecheses, the Pope based his reflections on the Book of Genesis (especially Genesis 1:27 and 2:24), the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 5:27–28), and the letters of Paul to the Corinthians and the Ephesians. John Paul II began his reflections with the Book of Genesis, particularly the story of creation in Genesis 1–3, which affirms that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. From the beginning, humans were created by *Imago Dei*, showing their unique dignity that is unmatched by any other creature. The human body is a living sacrament, an outward sign that reveals the inner and spiritual reality of the human person. John Paul II described the human body as a “visible sign of an invisible reality” (West, 2007). God created humans as male and female to live in a union of love that mirrors the love within the Holy Trinity. The body expresses spiritual truths about God and humanity, serving not merely as a material object but as a means of self-revelation and true love.

In their original state, Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony. Their nakedness symbolized purity and authentic freedom. John Paul II referred to this state as “original nakedness,” a nakedness without shame. Waldstein emphasized the concept of “original nakedness,” where man and woman lived in purity without shame, viewing each other as gifts rather than objects of lust (Waldstein, 2006). This nakedness did not solely refer to physical states but also reflected an openness, sincerity, and fullness of love in their hearts and minds. In this state of nakedness, humans experienced true freedom to give themselves entirely to others in love without any selfish motives. Here, the body was not regarded as an object but as a medium to offer oneself wholly in love. Man and woman honored and recognized each other as gifts from God. Their bodies had their own “language,” expressing a love that was free, total, faithful, and open to life. John Paul II called this the “spousal meaning of the body,” meaning that the human body was created for self-giving in love (Paul II, 2005).

However, after humanity's fall into sin (Genesis 3:7), this communion and harmony were broken. Original sin caused humanity to lose its original harmony. Due to selfish desires, Eve fell into sin, and this fall led Adam and Eve to recognize their nakedness. John Paul II explained that sin brought the consequence of shame, marking a rupture in humanity's relationships with God, others, and themselves. This shame led humans to feel the need to hide and cover their bodies. Sin corrupted the relationship between man and woman, and the body began to be viewed in distorted ways. Shame arose as humans started to see the body not as a medium for self-giving but as an object of lust. The body became seen as an object for self-gratification rather than as a means for sincere self-giving. Sin led humanity to misuse the body and sexuality through selfishness, objectification, and superficial gratification (West, 2007). John Paul II described humanity's fall into sin as a separation from the spousal meaning of the body, resulting in broken relationships with God, fear, and shame. Sin also damaged the relationships between men and women, shifting relationships from pure love to relationships of domination and possession. The body ceased to be

a sign of self-giving and became an object of exploitation. Additionally, sin caused self-alienation, where humans lost their understanding of their dignity as creations of God.

In the following sections, John Paul II emphasized that Christ's redemption restored the lost meaning of the body. The human body gained greater dignity because Christ redeemed humanity's sins through His own body. John Paul II stressed that redemption saves not only the human soul but also the human body. The body became an integral part of God's plan for salvation. The redemption of the body also enables humans to live in purity. John Paul II highlighted the importance of purity of heart, which allows humans to view the body with respect and genuine love, free from lust. Purity of heart is a calling to see the body in the light of true love, avoiding objectification that undermines human dignity (Waldstein, 2006).

Purity of heart encompasses not only physical actions but also the sanctity of thoughts, intentions, and personal conduct. John Paul II viewed purity of heart and body as integral aspects of Christian living. Purity reflects moral and spiritual cleanliness. In the *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II emphasized that humans must preserve the purity of their bodies as an act of reverence toward themselves, others, and God. He likened the human body to the temple of God, a sacred dwelling place of His presence. Thus, humans must not use their bodies for deeds against God's will, such as adultery. The body is not for sin but for glorifying God. The body serves as the medium through which individuals express love, faithfulness, and devotion to God. Human bodies hold immense value and must be respected as sacred dwellings of God's presence (Primus, 2014).

John Paul II also emphasized the importance of sexual morality in Christian life. According to him, sexuality must be integrated into a life of love and respect for human dignity. He asserted that through proper sexual morality, humans could honor their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and demonstrate love toward others as part of Christ's commandment of love. Recognizing the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit calls for honoring and caring for it responsibly. Respecting the body equates to respecting the presence of God within it (Waldstein, 2006). Therefore, understanding the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit provides a strong moral foundation for maintaining the body with dignity, not just for personal benefits but also as an act of reverence for God's presence. John Paul II also addressed the dangers of pornography and the misuse of sexuality that violates moral values in modern society. He described pornography as a degradation of human dignity and a cause of serious moral harm (Arrieta, 2023). He considered immoral sexual behaviors such as premarital sex or infidelity as violations of God's divine plan (Black, 2023).

The understanding of the body does not end with earthly realities but also includes a divine and transcendent dimension. John Paul II revealed that the human body is not merely mortal but destined for glorification in eternal life (eschatological hope) (Thatcher, 2020). The resurrection of the body signifies the complete restoration of human dignity and the fulfillment of divine love in the "wedding feast of the Lamb," representing the union between humanity and God in heaven. The resurrection of the body highlights humanity's ultimate calling to the perfection of love. In heaven, human bodies will be raised in glory, free from weaknesses and the corruption of sin. Human bodies will attain glory through resurrection. Relationships between men and women will achieve ultimate fulfillment in union with God. Humanity will live in perfect communion with God, described as the communion of saints (Vaggione, 2020).

John Paul II also discussed two main vocations in human life: the vocation to marriage and the vocation to celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven, both of which carry profound theological significance and complement each other (Waldstein, 2006). Marriage symbolizes God's love

manifested through the self-giving between husband and wife, while celibacy represents an eschatological sign directing humanity toward eternal life, where they will live in perfect union with God. Marriage is a sacred and holy communion that mirrors Christ's love for His Church. In this communion, the language of the body becomes a sacrament of God's love. Through unitive and procreative acts of love, men and women participate in God's creative work. Through lawful marital relationships, men and women not only unite their bodies and souls but also open themselves to becoming instruments in creating new life in accordance with God's plan to fill the earth. In marriage, self-giving must be total. At this stage, self-giving involves not only physicality but also the heart and soul.

In this full self-giving, married couples not only express their love for each other but also their readiness to embrace the gift of life that may result from their union. Participation in the creation of new life must also align with God's will. Therefore, the relationship between men and women transcends mere sexual aspects and involves mutual complementarity in daily life, mutual respect, and contributions toward building a better world (Thatcher, 2020).

b. Theology of the Body: A Solution for Restoring the True Meaning of the Human Body

In the context of a modern world increasingly driven by digitization and controlled by consumerist paradigms, the human body is often viewed merely as a commodity. Social media, the entertainment industry, and global markets systematically exploit the human body for economic, aesthetic, and instant gratification purposes (Harren et al., 2021). In the modern world, the body frequently loses its theological meaning. This phenomenon is evident in pornography, the exploitation of bodies in advertising, and the pressures from social media to conform to an ideal body image. Practices such as the pornography industry, human trafficking, the exploitation of women's bodies in advertisements, and trends in plastic surgery to meet shallow beauty standards demonstrate how the body has been reduced to a consumable object. Consequently, the body loses its divine meaning and dignity as a "gift." This degradation diminishes human dignity. The body is no longer understood within the framework of intrinsic values as an "icon" reflecting humanity's existence in the image and likeness of God but is instead reduced to an object that can be bought, exploited, and judged solely on its physical aspects.

The commodification of the body shifts human value to material aspects, causing dehumanization and reducing individuals to mere tools for satisfying desires (Wanniarachchi et al., 2022). This also leads to a crisis of identity, where individuals define themselves based on external standards rather than the inherent dignity of being created by God. It fosters superficial relationships, where the body is used for manipulation and personal gain rather than as a means of genuine self-giving. In this crisis, John Paul II's Theology of the Body emerges as a solution offering the restoration of the true meaning of the human body. In addressing the identity crisis caused by consumerist culture, the Theology of the Body helps individuals understand that their value lies not in their physical appearance or worldly standards but in their divine calling as images of God.

The Theology of the Body provides solutions to address the crises and realities mentioned above. It offers a transformative perspective through several key points. John Paul II taught that the body is an integral part of human identity, not merely a commodity or object. The body, in its relationship with the soul, holds sacred value and directs humanity toward its Creator. The body is not merely a mortal matter but participates in human spiritual life and serves as the tangible expression of the invisible soul. The human body possesses divine dignity because it is created in the image and likeness of God. The body is part of a "theological identity" that connects humanity to its origins and ultimate purpose in God (May 2010). The body is not just a

physical entity but a “sacrament” revealing spiritual reality. Through the body, humans reflect love and their identity as the image of God (*Imago Dei*). The body must not be reduced to a tool for consumption or an object of exploitation; it must be respected as a divine gift that reflects God’s truth. John Paul II restored the understanding that the human body has transcendent value and is part of humanity’s call to true happiness. The body must be understood as sacred, not merely as a tool. This perspective firmly rejects the consumerist ideology that exploits the human body, where the body is often seen as an object or a consumable item.

The Theology of the Body emphasizes that the body is called to “give,” not “take.” Sexuality, in its theological sense, is a vocation for mutual self-giving in authentic relationships, such as in marriage. In marriage, sexuality becomes an expression of the union between man and woman, reflecting God’s love for the Church (Ephesians 5:25–32). According to John Paul II, sexuality is a call for total and free self-giving in love. This view contrasts with the modern cultural perspective and objectifying mentality, which often sees sexuality as a means of ego fulfillment and mere pleasure, reducing the body to a tool for instant gratification. The Theology of the Body offers a vision of authentic love, where the body becomes a “language” expressing love that is total, free, and faithful. The human body, through the sexual differences of men and women, embodies the meaning of “self-giving love.” John Paul II described the body as a “sacrament of love,” where humans are called to love, not to exploit. This relationship liberates humans from utilitarian relationships that exploit others for personal gain. The Theology of the Body elevates the dignity of the human body as a means to experience “self-giving love,” not selfish consumption. It offers a profound critique of a culture that reduces the body to mere objects of pleasure, where sexuality is often separated from the meaning of true love and becomes a tool for selfish gratification (hedonism) (Paul II, 1984).

c. Embodying the Theology of the Body in Life

In addressing the consumerist, individualistic, and relativistic culture, the Theology of the Body invites people to understand the body as a sacrament of love, live out sexuality as self-giving, and view marriage as a divine vocation to build community. Through this approach, John Paul II’s Theology of the Body becomes not only relevant but also urgent as a guide for addressing the shifting fundamental values of the modern era. In his works, *Theology of the Body Explained* (2007) and *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (2009), Christopher West provides practical guidance for the faithful to live out the meaning of the body and sexuality in accordance with God’s plan, drawing from John Paul II’s teachings. This guidance emphasizes humanity’s calling to understand the body and sexuality as integral parts of their identity as images and likenesses of God.

Christopher West identifies five main aspects of practicing the Theology of the Body:

First, Respecting the Body.

Christopher West highlights the theological dignity of the human body, created as an icon of God’s love. The body serves as a medium through which humans express love that is free, total, faithful, and fruitful. He emphasizes recognizing the body as a sacrament—an outward sign pointing to the invisible reality of God’s Trinitarian love. In human relationships, the body conveys a calling to selflessly give to others in genuine love, rejecting selfishness or lustful desires. Respecting the body means rejecting the culture of objectification. West critiques modern culture for reducing the body to a sexual object through pornography, exploitation, and superficial beauty standards. The body, he asserts, is not a commodity but a sign of God’s presence. He urges people to view the body with “eyes of purity”—a perspective free from selfish intent and full of reverence. Respecting the body also involves caring for it as a gift, maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual health, and acknowledging that the body is the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). By

respecting their bodies and those of others, people align their lives with their dignity as God's creations (West, 2007).

Second, Sexual Purity.

West defines sexual purity as the ability to love without dominating and to see the body and sexuality in the light of God's love. Purity involves directing sexual desires toward their true purpose rather than suppressing them. Practicing sexual purity encompasses several aspects, such as controlling sexual desires through spiritual discipline and self-control. Believers are called to resist selfish, lustful temptations and misuse of the body. West emphasizes that purity does not reject sexuality but values it according to God's design. In marriage, purity manifests as faithfulness, where sexual relations are seen as a liturgical act in which spouses give themselves entirely to one another, as Christ gave Himself to the Church (Ephesians 5:25). For unmarried or celibate individuals, purity is realized through surrendering sexual desires to God, not as a rejection of sexuality but as a new way of living the "call to love" through service to others. Sexual purity restores the dignity of the body and leads to true happiness, enabling people to love as God loves (West, 2007).

Third, Self-Giving in Love.

Pope John Paul II teaches that the human body was created for "self-giving," which is a fundamental principle of the Theology of the Body. Humanity discovers its true self through sincere self-gift to others. This practice includes love within marriage, where the relationship between husband and wife reflects the love of the Holy Trinity. When lived correctly, sexuality becomes a sign of free and total self-giving. West highlights that contraception disrupts the totality of self-giving and openness to life. Additionally, he underscores celibacy as another form of self-giving. Celibacy is not a rejection of the body but an offering of oneself to God and the Church. Priests, monks, and nuns dedicate their bodies and desires to the universal service of love. Even outside marriage or celibacy, all believers are called to self-giving through acts of service, sacrifice, and care for others in daily life. Through self-giving, the body becomes a channel of grace, leading humanity to its ultimate purpose: union with God in eternal love (West, 2007).

Fourth, Proper Education on Sexuality.

West stresses the importance of sexual education rooted in the theological truths of the body and sexuality. This education aims to help believers understand the body as a gift from God, not as a source of sin or shame. It involves understanding sexuality's true meaning—not merely as a biological function but as a sign of God's love revealed in the creation of men and women. Parents hold the responsibility to teach children about the body, sexuality, and human dignity in an age-appropriate manner and the light of faith. This education also requires courage to reject cultural narratives promoting casual sex. Proper education instills gratitude for the body and empowers people to live in true freedom.

Fifth, Restoration from Cultural Distortions.

Recognizing the cultural distortions inflicted on the body and sexuality, West highlights the necessity of healing and restoration. This process begins with repentance and the sacrament of reconciliation, acknowledging sin and receiving God's forgiveness to heal wounds caused by misuse of the body and sexuality. Restoration continues through emotional and spiritual healing. For those affected by sexual exploitation, West offers a path of recovery through God's grace, prayer, and pastoral care. Restoring one's view of the body involves reflecting on the Theology of the Body to recognize the body as a sacred gift rather than a source of sin. This process enables people to live in truth and experience true freedom in God's love (West, 2007).

By respecting the body, living in sexual purity, giving oneself in love, educating sexuality correctly, and seeking restoration from cultural distortions, humanity can return to its original calling: living in genuine love that glorifies God. These practices pave the way to true happiness and union with God in eternal love.

d. Theology of the Body as a Theological Endeavor

Research on the Theology of the Body, formulated by Pope John Paul II and elaborated by Christopher West and other theologians, represents a profound theological effort to understand the meaning of the body and sexuality in the light of Christian faith. However, like any other theological inquiry, this study has several limitations that deserve attention. The Theology of the Body is rooted in the context of the Roman Catholic Church and European culture of the 20th century, which does not fully align with the social, cultural, and modern challenges faced across the world. For instance, cultural variations exist in how different societies perceive the concepts of the body, sexuality, and marriage, which may differ from the views expressed by John Paul II (West, 2007).

In certain non-Western cultures, unique approaches to sexuality and gender relations may not be entirely reflected in this theological framework. Gender relations in such contexts should be understood as shaped by societal norms (social conditions, customs, and prevailing cultural practices) rather than being inherently natural. This means that the concept of the body, in the context of gender relations, is part of “social engineering” rather than a fixed or innate reality (Truna et al., 2022).

In the modern cultural context, the Theology of the Body challenges contemporary narratives that often objectify the body and glorify sexual freedom. However, this approach may appear idealistic or difficult to accept for those influenced by modern perspectives on sexuality. This presents a challenge in implementing practical guidelines, as articulated by Christopher West. Although the contribution of the Theology of the Body to enriching the understanding of the body and sexuality remains significant, further research is necessary to address its application.

Research on the Theology of the Body should reflect the challenges of bridging profound theological ideas with the diverse social, cultural, and pastoral realities of modern times. Expanding the context of theological reflection and addressing modern issues more inclusively would enhance the relevance and effectiveness of these teachings for contemporary society.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that John Paul II's Theology of the Body holds significant relevance in addressing the crisis of the value of the body and sexuality in the modern era. Through a profound theological anthropology approach, this teaching not only critiques consumerism and the objectification of the body but also offers a holistic solution that restores the dignity of the human body as a means of love and self-giving. Unlike previous studies, such as Waldstein's (2006) textual analysis, this research integrates the teachings of the Theology of the Body with modern social phenomena, including the exploitation of the body in digital media and the fragmentation of sexual identity. These findings demonstrate that the human body can be understood as a sacrament of love reflecting God's love, providing a new direction for understanding human relationships, sexuality, and marriage in the modern age.

The primary contribution of this study lies in developing a theology- and ethics-based understanding of the body, which offers not only a theological vision but also spiritual and social transformation. By integrating the practical perspectives of Christopher West and in-depth analyses from primary sources such as Waldstein, this research provides a theological framework

applicable to addressing pornography, consumer culture, and the commodification of the body. This approach enhances the relevance of John Paul II's Theology of the Body in fostering healthy, dignified, and sacred relationships, making it a significant theological solution to modern cultural challenges.

However, this study has limitations in its empirical scope, as it relies on a literature review method without directly involving phenomenological analysis of individuals affected by the anthropological crisis of the body. Future research could explore the practical application of John Paul II's Theology of the Body through case studies or qualitative approaches, such as examining communities affected by the exploitation of the body in digital media. Moreover, further studies should delve into the relevance of these teachings within non-Western cultural contexts to expand their analytical scope in addressing more complex global challenges.

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