

“Ecce Homo” (John 19:5)
Behold the (Wo)Man!
A Johannine Proclamation of Hope in God’s Promises
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ABSTRACT

In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan brought three religious images to the Philippines, including the Ecce Homo, a half-relief wooden sculpture depicting the upper torso and head of Jesus Christ. Despite persistent efforts to promote its veneration, the Ecce Homo has not achieved the widespread popularity of the Sto. Niño de Cebu. This study undertakes a critical re-examination of the Ecce Homo, focusing on its scriptural context within the Passion narrative in John 18-19. Specifically, it analyzes Pilate's pronouncement Ecce Homo in John 19:5 to elucidate its profound significance within the Johannine Christological narrative. Moreover, this article demonstrates a compelling connection between the phrase's meaning and the Old Testament concept of a God who actively champions the marginalized and impoverished.

Significantly, Pilate's expression Ecce Homo transcends the immediate portrayal of the suffering Christ, encompassing the broader reality of suffering humanity – those afflicted by social injustice, ecological crisis and moral degradation. The Ecce Homo, therefore, emerges not merely as a devotional icon, but as a potent symbol of hope in God's promise of justice and righteousness.

Keywords: Ecce Homo, Johannine Christology, hope, promise, justice, righteousness

INTRODUCTION

Ecce Homo (VUL)
Ἴδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος (SBLGNT)
Behold the Man (NRSV-CE)

These were the words of Pontius Pilate to the Jews when he showed Jesus “wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.” R. Fredrikson describes the scenario as “the most intense and provocative encounters in all Scripture”¹ leading to Jesus’ death. We could imagine how appalling the situation was to Jesus’ disciples who witnessed this tragic and shameful occasion; their “Teacher” (John 1:38), and “Lord” (John 1:23) is made to suffer a horrible punishment. Perhaps they might be asking: How could our “Rabbi” be treated as a criminal? Or, does our long-awaited “Messiah” (John 1: 41) deserve to die? To an even greater degree, the shameful episode would have a tremendous effect on Jesus himself who “must have presented a sorry

¹ R. Fredrikson, “John,” In *The Communicator's Commentary*, Volume 4, edited by L. Ogilvie (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 269.

sight with his beaten face and the blood oozing from the thorns.”² Surely, the torment, and the humiliation imposed on him had caused him physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual distress.

A recent theological study of the said biblical text was made by A. Kubiś in 2018 who resorted to an Old Testament background of this phrase particularly in the discussion on the “Son of Man” in Dan 7:13-22, the “Suffering Servant” in the book of Isaiah, the messianic “Man” in Zech 6:12, the eschatological “Man” in Num 24:17, the Adamic typology in the book of Genesis, the King in 1 Sam 9:17, and finally the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs. To him, these OT references encapsulated Pilate’s *Ecce Homo* utterance and once converged, they paint together one multi-hued image of Jesus.³ The study of A. Kubiś confirmed the study of S. Binz in 1955 who noted that Pilate’s proclamation “is rich with multi-layered meaning.”⁴ To him, Pilate is “displaying Jesus as an unfortunate and broken man who should not be taken seriously.”⁵ But of course, one cannot escape to ask: What did Pilate really mean by “*Ecce Homo*” when he presented Jesus to the Jews? Such a query opens a new prospect in the person of the Johannine Jesus. Specifically, we will demonstrate how this Christological phrase paves the way to the Filipino devotion to the “*Ecce Homo*” whose image was believed to have been brought to the Philippine islands in 1521 along with the image of Señor Santo de Cebu.

This exegetical-theological essay begins by examining the literary context of John 19:5, where Pilate declares, “*Ecce Homo*.”⁶ We will then explore the person of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John, focusing on how He becomes the manifestation of YHWH as revealed in the Old Testament. Building on this background, we will draw significant insights to deepen one’s relationship with Jesus Christ—the center of devotion promoted through the *Ecce Homo*.

Delimitation of the Text

Literally, the text in John 19:5 belongs to the passion narrative in Chapters 18-19. Various scholars such as Brown, Dodd, Moloney, and Malina and Rohrbaugh divide this section

² G. Osborne, “The Gospel of John,” Volume 13, *Tyndale Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, edited by Philip Comfort (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2007), 267.

³ A. Kubiś, “The Old Testament Background of ‘*Ecce Homo*’ in John 19:5,” *Biblical et Patristica Thoruniensia* 11 (2018) 4: 495–519.

⁴ S. Binz, *The Passion and Resurrection Narrative of Jesus: A Commentary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1955), 107.

⁵ S. Binz, *The Passion and Resurrection Narrative of Jesus*, 107.

⁶ The phrase *Ecce Homo* has received wide scholarly attention across theological, historical, and cultural disciplines. Patristic authors emphasized its Christological significance, focusing on Christ’s humanity and humiliation (see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985], 47–52). In the medieval period, the phrase became a focal point of devotion and art, as seen in the *Man of Sorrows* tradition (cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* [New York: Zone Books, 2011], 104–110). In modern theology, *Ecce Homo* has been interpreted as a revelation of divine humility and dramatic self-giving (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994], 263–70). In contrast, Friedrich Nietzsche appropriated the phrase ironically in his critique of Christian morality (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [London: Penguin Books, 1992]). These interpretations illustrate the enduring theological tension between irony and revelation, suffering and kingship.

into three main parts.⁷ The first part, John 18:1-27, narrates the arrest of and the interrogation of Jesus. The second part, John 18:28-19:16a, is the central scene which reports the accusation of Jesus before Pilate. The last part, John 19:16b-42, tells the execution of Jesus on the cross and his burial.

In the tripartite division, Pilate's exclamation "Ecce Homo" in John 19:5 belongs to the second part of the passion narrative. Scholars such as Brown, Whitacre, Burge, Blomberg, Keener, and Osborne observe a chiastic pattern in John 18:28-19:6a with emphasis on two stages, inside stage and outside stage, where the trial was being held.⁸

- A. Outside: The Jews demand Jesus' death (18:28-32)
- B. Inside: Pilate questions Jesus about his kingship (18:33-38a)
- C. Outside: Pilate finds Jesus not guilty (18: 38b-40)
- D. Inside: The soldiers scourge Jesus (19:1-3)
- C'. Outside: Pilate finds Jesus not guilty (19:4-8)
- B'. Inside: Pilate talks with Jesus about Power (19:9-11)
- A'. Outside: The Jews obtain Jesus' death (19:12-16a).

The text narrates how the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium of the Roman governor (John 18:28a). They did this **outside** praetorium to avoid ritual defilement (v.28b). Pilate came out to them and asked about the charges they brought against the man Jesus (v.29). They did not reply to the question of Pilate outrightly but instead responded to him in a hypothetical statement: "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over" (v. 30). Pilate told them to take Jesus to themselves so that they may judge him by their own law (v. 31) to which they objected because they have no right to execute (v.32).

Now **inside** the praetorium, Pilate came face to face with Jesus for the first time and asked him if he were the king of the Jews (v. 33). Jesus responded by questioning Pilate as to where he got the idea about him as king (v.34). Pilate responded to Jesus again with a question, this time regarding his citizenship. Pilate insisted that it was the Jewish people and the chief priests who handed him over to him (v.35). Jesus had now the confidence to tell Pilate that he was a king (v. 37) but his kingdom is not of this world (v.36). Jesus further elaborated that the reason he was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth and those who side on the truth listen to him (v. 37).

Pilate went **outside** and declared to the Jews gathered there that he had no basis for a charge against Jesus (v. 38b). In short, to Pilate, Jesus was not guilty. But since it was the custom to release one prisoner at the time of the Passover, he offered them to release Jesus 'the king of the Jews' (v. 39). But they responded vehemently to release Barabbas instead (v. 40).

Inside, Jesus had experienced physical abuse by the soldiers. After Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged by the soldiers (19:1), they put a crown of thorns on his head (v. 2) and clothed him in purple robe (v. 2). They slapped his face and in a resounding chorus, the people shouted "Hail, king of the Jews!" (v.3).

⁷ N. Vargas, *Word and Witness: An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), 272-76.

⁸ N. Vargas, *Word and Witness*, 272-76.

Pilate again went **outside** telling the people that he found no basis to charge Jesus (v. 4). With his bruised body caused by the soldiers' abuses upon him inside, Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate introduced him to the people: "Behold the man!" (v. 5). The chief priests and their officials were shouting, convincing Pilate to crucify Jesus. But, Pilate expressed once again his previous decision that he had found no basis for a charge against Jesus (v. 6). With the insistence of the Jewish leaders, Pilate became more afraid (v. 8).

Thus, he came **inside** the praetorium, and interrogated Jesus once again (v. 9) of his origin. Jesus did not respond but when he told him that he has power to free or crucify him (v. 10), he told him that Pilate's power was given to him from above and his accusers were actually the ones guilty of a greater sin (v. 11).

With Jesus' answer, Pilate, for another time found no reason to charge the accused. The Jewish leaders kept on insisting to crucify Jesus. They even threatened Pilate that if he would free Jesus, he must be an opponent of Caesar (v. 12). Again, he brought Jesus **outside** and had Jesus sit on the judge's seat (v. 13), as if their king (v. 14). The people however could not accept such a gesture imposed on Jesus and insisted forcefully to remove him from the judgment seat. They believed that only Caesar was their king (v. 15). To avoid further commotion, Pilate finally gave in to their request. He handed Jesus over to be crucified (v. 16a).

Clearly, the text in John 19:5 happened outside the praetorium when Pilate confronted the Jews after Jesus was physically abused by the soldiers inside the palace. He presented Jesus to them as guilty of no charge. Jesus claimed that he was a king but his kingship was not of this world. Pilate knew that Jesus' claim would not threaten the empire. Pilate was sure that Jesus was innocent. But, as the certainty of Jesus' innocence becomes increasingly clear to him, there was obviously an inner struggle in Pilate. As Fredrickson notes, "One can feel the vacillation and uncertainty in Pilate as he moves back and forth, in and out, from the quiet, probing conversation with Jesus in the Praetorium to angry political pressure of the Jews outside who are demanding the death of the Man he faces."⁹ Morgan commented on Pilate's action on this scene in this way: "What was Pilate doing? He had violated all justice in having Him scourged, and yet down in the heart and mind of him was the hope that the scourged and lacerated and thorn crowned and bruised, and bleeding Man would appeal to their pity."¹⁰ Apparently, "Pilate's appeal to the Jews' finer feelings goes unheeded."¹¹ Why is this so? A glimpse on how Jesus was introduced in the Gospel of John can clarify this matter.

Jesus in the Gospel of John

Pilate's presentation of Jesus as the king of the Jews came after Jesus' confession of his kingship. With his crown of thorn and purple robe donned to him by the soldiers, Pilate told the Jews, "Behold the Man" (Ecce Homo). Such a statement has a rich theological underpinning in the gospel of John. Smith pointed out that "in typical Johannine fashion, and with a touch of irony, Pilate is saying more than he could possibly know theologically."¹²

⁹ R. Fredrickson, "John," 269.

¹⁰ G. Morgan, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1951), 289.

¹¹ E. E. Ellis, *The World of St. John: the Gospel and the Epistles* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965), ??

¹² D. M. Smith, "John," In *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 346.

Pilate referred to Jesus as the Man (Homo). The interjection “Behold!” (Ecce) gives a “peculiar vivacity by bidding the reader or hearer to attend to what is said.”¹³ Both in the Hebrew Bible and NT Greek, the interjection “Behold!” (ἰδοὺ in Greek, הנה in Hebrew) can be used to point out to people (Cf. Gen 30:3, Matt 12:2, 47; 13:3; 24:26; Mark 3:32; Luke 2:34), or to call attention (Cf. Mark 15:35 Luke 22:10; John 4:35; 1 Cor 15:51; 2 Cor 5:17; James 5:9; Jude 1:14; Rev 1:7; 9:12; 11:14; 16:15; 22:7). In the case of John 19:5, Pilate was perhaps telling the Jews to gaze at the “Man” Jesus, to focus their attention on him, and to have a sight on the one who claimed to be their King whose kingdom is not of this earth. We may ask however, who is this “Man,” whom Pilate wanted the Jews to gaze at?

Let it be known that the author of the gospel of John starts by calling Jesus as the “Word who became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), and this “Word was with God” and in fact, God Himself. Hence, Jesus as the “Word is God” (John 1:1). Jesus is also the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) whom John the Baptist acclaims as one “who takes away the sin of the world!” When Andrew came to Simon after his encounter with Jesus, he said of him as “the Messiah” (John 1:41). In John 3:29, Jesus is the “Bridegroom,” and in John 4:10, he is the “Living Water.” The woman in John 4:42 believed that Jesus is “the Savior of the world,” and when the people saw the sign that he had done, they called him the “Prophet” (John 6:14).

Furthermore, in the gospel of John, Jesus reveals himself as “I AM” (Ἐγώ εἰμι). He says: “I am the Bread of Life” in John 6:35 sent from heaven to give life; “I am the Light of the World” in John 8:12 who guides people towards “the light of life;” “I am the door” in John 10:9 through which the sheep enter; “I am the Good Shepherd” in John 10:11 who knows the sheep and lays down his life for them; “I am the resurrection, and the life” in John 11:25; “I am the way, the truth, and the life” in John 14:6; “I am the true vine” in John 15:1. These claims of Jesus only reveal that He is the great “I am” (Ἐγώ εἰμι).

In the OT, “I am” (Ἐγώ εἰμι) is often used for the divine name of God who reveals himself to Moses in Exod 3:13-15:

But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations. (NRSV-CE)

Interestingly, “I am” (אֶהְיֶה = *Ehyeh* in Hebrew and Ἐγώ εἰμι in Greek) is the name for the “LORD” (יְהוָה = *YHWH*), the God of the universe. He reveals himself to Moses as eternal – meaning, no beginning and no end. He simply “is.” With Jesus’ claim as “I AM” the “Bread of Life,” “the Light of the World,” “the Door,” “the Good Shepherd,” “the Resurrection, and the Life,” “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and “the True Vine,” he considers himself in equal

¹³ C. J. Labuschagne “The Particles *hen* and *hinneh*,” In *Syntax and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Syntax and Biblical Exegesis*, edited by C. J. Labuschagne et al. 1-14, OTS 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 1-14.

footing with the God of Moses. Hence, he should be claiming that he is the God who reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush.¹⁴ It is nothing less than a theophany – an appearance of God – the same God who appeared to Moses on Sinai. By referring himself as “I am,” he is revealing his divine identity as the LORD coming in person.¹⁵

Jesus as a Man had simply been “a great moral teacher, a gentle rabbi who did nothing more than urge his devoted followers to love God and one another, or an itinerant philosopher.”¹⁶ This would scarcely have been seen as a threat to the Romans to the point of nailing him on the cross since great moral teachers were not crucified - unless their teachings were considered subversive.¹⁷ But as we have seen, with his acclamation as “I AM,” Jesus considered himself God, as the Jews succinctly told Pilate: “he has made himself the Son of God” (v. 7). Such title of Jesus in the Gospel of John means that Jesus’ life and personhood is the manifestation of God in flesh (John 1:14). Henceforth, Jesus as the “Son of God” literally means that He is God. This is the obvious reason why the Jews, despite Pilate’s insistence that he saw no charge against him, wanted him crucified. In the passion narrative of John, Pilate’s not guilty verdict on Jesus was based on his political discernment. Unfortunately, the Jews’ double cry for crucifixion was motivated not by political issue, but an issue on religion.¹⁸

An Appeal to Religion

The Jews insisted on the law which served as the basis for their call to crucify Jesus. In John 19:7, they told Pilate: “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” What is this law to which the Jews are referring?

The book of Leviticus points out that a person “who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him; the sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death” (24:16). The very purpose of such law is for the Israelites to live a holy lifestyle in conformity with the holy nature of God.¹⁹ Jesus should have been stoned to death but the Jews insisted that he should be crucified.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 provides a law applied to a hanged man. It says:

“When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you must bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not defile the land that the LORD your God is giving you for possession.” (NRSV-CE)

¹⁴ J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Yale University Press, 1991), 177.

¹⁵ B. Pitre, *The Case of Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 159.

¹⁶ B. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (USA: Harper One, 2014), 275-76.

¹⁷ B. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 275-76.

¹⁸ R. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Makati City, Philippines: St. Pauls, 1994), 92.

¹⁹ I. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), ??

In the text presented above, hanging apparently was not a method of execution but was done only after the death of a criminal. Maxwell explains that “the lifeless body would be hung publicly to call attention to the gravity of breaking God’s law. As soon as the public had seen the effect of sin upon his life, the corpse was buried, always before sunset on the day of the hanging.”²⁰

In Jesus’ case, he was not stoned to death as prescribed in Lev 24:16, and then hanged on a tree as stipulated in Deut 21:22-23. Jesus was put to death by the terrible method of crucifixion – a shameful punishment in the Graeco-Roman world.²¹ Neyrey says that crucifixion was a punishment appropriate for slaves, bandits, prisoners of war, and revolutionaries. It was a form of a degradation ritual labeling an accused a shameful person.²² The Religious leaders considered Jesus shameful because of his blasphemous claims. He who was considered by his followers as their “Teacher,” “Lord,” and “Messiah,” and who claimed to be the revelation of the Father, was crucified because he was a threat to the religious leaders of that time who were scandalized by his claims. “He seemed to be putting himself on an equal footing with the living God himself.”²³

Ecce Homo: A Proclamation of Hope in God’s Promises

With the exegetico-theological analysis of the phrase *Ecce Homo* (John 19:5) presented above, our investigation may be succinctly summarized as follows:

First, Pilate presents Jesus as the Man of Sorrows.²⁴ Pilate was aware that Jesus did not commit any mistakes. Jesus simply shows the love of the Father concretely in his life, words, and signs. Even up to his passion, Jesus shows that the one who truly loves is always ready to experience sorrows and pains.

Second, the expression “Ecce Homo” in John 19:5 serves as part of the Christian message: “Jesus is the perfection of humanity tragically portrayed at the point of his self-sacrifice.”²⁵ Despite the humiliation and pain he experienced, Jesus remained calm and disposed for he knew that all these things would happen to fulfill the Father’s will.

Third, Jesus is in reality ‘the Man,’ the manifestation of God, and the Word became flesh.²⁶ The Gospel of John had been very consistent with its portrayal of Jesus. His words, signs, life, and ministry manifest the Father. Hence, “He is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). The author of the Gospel of John says that those who believe that Jesus is the Christ may have life in Jesus.

²⁰ J. Maxwell, “Deuteronomy,” In *The communicator’s Commentary*, Volume 5, edited by L. Ogilvie (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 252.

²¹ N. Vargas, *Word and Witness*, 274.

²² J. Neyrey, “Despising the Shame of the Cross’: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative,” In *Social-Scientific Approaches to the New Testament*, edited by D. Horell (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 167.

²³ J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week: From The Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection* (New York: Image, 2012), 178.

²⁴ R. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 92.

²⁵ E. E. Ellis, *The World of St. John*, ??

²⁶ G. Osborne, “The Gospel of John,” 270.

Fourth, “Jesus is the suffering Son of Man on his way to glory.”²⁷ The story of Jesus did not end on his death on the cross. The climax of Jesus’ life is his Resurrection from the dead. It is the resurrection that gives meaning to his suffering and death. It is the resurrection that gives meaning to the cross. Paul succinctly upholds that “. . . we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:23-24). This became possible because of the Resurrection, otherwise Jesus’ death on the cross would have been the same as that of others who were also crucified during his time.

Finally, when Pilate exclaims “Ecce Homo,” Jesus was wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe which signifies his character as Messiah-king “whose power comes from God and not from human being.”²⁸ According to Vargas, Jesus as a king, “is a shepherd of his people who laid down his life for his sheep. His power is exhibited in nonviolent action.”²⁹ Vargas further elaborates that Jesus’ kingship, “which is not of this world, is motivated by his love for his friends.”³⁰

Now, our devotion to the “Ecce Homo” should stir us to gaze at Jesus, the incarnate Son of God who embraced human sufferings, pains, and humiliation, to manifest God’s love and mercy for His people. Thus, Jesus’ suffering which led to his death was not the end of his mission on earth – it was just a beginning of a new life of his followers with Him – a life enthralled by self-sacrifice and selfless love, a kind of life that each and every follower of Jesus should also embrace. Perhaps, this serves as a proclamation of God’s promise of hope in the midst of sufferings experienced by the vulnerable in our society nowadays.

Hope amidst sufferings

The Philippines continues to grapple with long-standing socio-economic challenges, including structural poverty, marginalization, wealth disparity, and pervasive social insecurity. These systemic issues persist as formidable obstacles to genuine and sustainable development, even amid official declarations of economic recovery and progress.³¹ Tragically, the most affected by these conditions are the poor, who constitute 15.5% of the population, or approximately 17.54 million Filipinos.³² While it is the government’s responsibility to address the needs of the impoverished, these officials have, regrettably, compounded their hardships. We can mention the ineffective Social Welfare Programs. While the government has implemented various social welfare programs like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), these are often criticized for inadequate coverage and inconsistent implementation. In

²⁷ S. Binz, *The Passion and resurrection Narrative of Jesus*, 107.

²⁸ N. Vargas, *Word and Witness*, 275.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See World Bank, *Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in the Philippines: Past, Present, and Prospects for the Future* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/11/24/ph-reducing-inequality-key-to-becoming-a-middle-class-society-free-of-poverty>.

³² See Philippine Statistics Authority, *Proportion of Poor Filipinos Registered at 15.5 Percent in 2023*, March 21, 2024, <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/poverty/node/1684064820>.

some areas, beneficiaries are left without support due to mismanagement, corruption, or bureaucratic inefficiencies, leaving the poorest without much-needed assistance. There have been reports of families being removed from the program despite meeting the criteria, or the funds not reaching the intended recipients due to corruption within local government units.³³ Moreover, the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) law, which was introduced in 2018, lowered personal income taxes for higher earners but raised excise taxes on goods like petroleum products, sugar-sweetened beverages, and coal. These increases disproportionately affect the poor, who spend a larger percentage of their income on basic goods and services. The poor, who rely heavily on public transportation, have suffered from increased fuel prices, while those with lower incomes find themselves spending more on daily necessities.³⁴ Furthermore, the government has also been criticized for criminalizing poverty. Not to mention the Duterte “Oplan Tokhang,” the criminalization of street vendors, who are often poor individuals trying to make a living, demonstrates the lack of government support for informal workers, many of whom face harassment, fines, or confiscation of goods by authorities.³⁵ It is also unfortunate to hear the poor’s limited Access to Education³⁶ and Healthcare.³⁷ Despite the government's rhetoric about providing free education and healthcare, access remains a significant issue for the poor. Public schools are often overcrowded, lack basic facilities, and provide inadequate quality education, especially in rural areas.³⁸ Similarly, government hospitals and clinics are often overwhelmed and underfunded, leading to poor service delivery. This leaves the poor with limited options and forces them to either pay out of pocket for private services or suffer from a lack of care.³⁹ During election periods, politicians often use poverty alleviation programs as tools for garnering votes. This has led to cases where aid or support programs are either delayed or selectively distributed based on political loyalty rather than need. There are “vote-buying” tactics, distributing resources only in areas where they had political support, while neglecting other communities. Every election, similar practices might resurface, where

³³ See Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr. and Vicente B. Paqueo, *Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program: Boon or Bane?* Discussion Paper Series No. 2016-56 (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, December 2016), <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1656.pdf>. See also R. L. Antonio, “4 of 5 Filipino Will Vote for 4Ps Bet, Says Survey,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 6, 2016, accessed April 9, 2025, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/771110/4-of-5-filipino-will-vote-for4ps-bet-says-survey>.

³⁴ See Czar Joseph Castillo, Ramon Clarete, Marjorie Muyrong, and Philip Tuaño, *Effects of TRAIN Fuel Excise Taxes on Goods and Prices*, Policy Notes No. 2019-11 (October 2019), <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1911.pdf>.

³⁵ See Human Rights Watch, “*They Treat Us Like Criminals*”: Abuses Against Informal Workers in the Philippines, September 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/24/they-treat-us-criminals/abuses-against-informal-workers-philippines>.

³⁶ See Philippine Business for Education (PBE), *State of Philippine Education Report 2023*, accessed April 20, 2025, <https://pbed.ph/blogs/47/PBE/State%20of%20Philippine%20Education%20Report%202023>.

³⁷ See Michael R. Cabalfin, *Health Financing for the Poor in the Philippines: Final Report*, Discussion Paper Series No. 2016-37 (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, December 2016), <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1637.pdf>.

³⁸ See Philippine Business for Education (PBE), *State of Philippine Education Report 2023*, accessed April 20, 2025, <https://pbed.ph/blogs/47/PBE/State%20of%20Philippine%20Education%20Report%202023>.

³⁹ See Michael R. Cabalfin, *Health Financing for the Poor in the Philippines: Final Report*, Discussion Paper Series No. 2016-37 (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, December 2016), <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1637.pdf>.

the poor are used as political pawns rather than being given genuine assistance or solutions to their problems.⁴⁰ These are, in my discernment, just some of the actions or systemic failures that paint a picture of a government that, instead of alleviating the struggles of the poor, often perpetuates or worsens their situation, hindering efforts to address poverty and inequality.

Despite these issues, the Filipinos are still hopeful because of their faith in Jesus. The Filipino devotion to Jesus is reflected in their belief in the ultimate promise of salvation and a better future, beyond this world. Many Filipinos hold fast to the belief that suffering in this life is temporary, and that God's promises of eternal life provide the ultimate comfort. This faith in the afterlife and God's justice gives people hope that their struggles will be rewarded, even if the full benefits of justice are not realized in this life. The hope for a better life in heaven enables them to face present hardships with a sense of peace and optimism.

We can see this in the rich tapestry of religious festivals, processions, and rituals that deepen the Filipino people's connection to Jesus. Celebrations such as *Pasko* (Christmas), *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), the *Feast of the Poong Nazareno*, and the *Santo Niño* festival serve as powerful communal expressions of faith. In these occasions, Filipinos come together to honor the life and teachings of Jesus, fostering a collective spirit of hope and identity. These sacred traditions remind them that, despite their struggles, they are part of a greater, divinely guided story—one that transcends the hardships of daily life. Indeed, Filipinos fix their gaze upon Jesus, echoing Pilate's words to the Jews: "Behold the Man." Yet as believers who embody Christ's presence in the world, we too are called to live in such a way that Pilate's words might also be spoken of us: "Behold the (Wo)Man!"

Behold the (Wo)Man!

As we have mentioned, our devotion and faith in Jesus serve not only as a source of comfort but also as a catalyst for social transformation in the Philippines—bringing hope to the marginalized. In this light, they are not merely gazing at the *Ecce Homo* icon, but becoming the very man or woman of whom Pilate declared: "Behold the (Wo)Man!"

Although corruption remains a persistent issue in the government, we must also acknowledge that there are politicians who strive to combat it and serve with integrity. Mayor Vico Sotto, for instance, has earned praise for his transparent governance and progressive leadership in Pasig City, initiating meaningful reforms for his constituents.⁴¹ Likewise, former Vice President Atty. Leni Robredo has consistently championed good governance, grassroots empowerment, and transparency through her *Angat Buhay* programs, even beyond her term in office.⁴² Their examples remind us that ethical and compassionate leadership is possible—and that hope in public service remains alive.

⁴⁰ See JC Punongbayan, "Opening the Floodgates to Ayuda," *Rappler*, January 10, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/rappler-voices-opening-floodgates-ayuda/>.

⁴¹ See Vico Sotto: Leading Pasig with Integrity and Reforms, *Philippine Observer*, January 13, 2025, <https://philippineobserver.net/2025/01/13/vico-sotto-leading-pasig-with-integrity-and-reforms/>.

⁴² See Leni Robredo, "Angat Buhay: A Legacy of Service," *PhilPost Blog*, May 14, 2024, <https://philpostblog.wordpress.com/2024/05/14/a-legacy-of-service-robredo-shares-inspiring-stories-about-angat-buhay-foundation/>.

Within the Church, there are local clergy and religious who actively champion social and environmental justice. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and Cardinal Virgilio David, for example, have inspired many through their prophetic words and consistent efforts to uphold justice and peace.⁴³ In Palawan, Bishop Broderick Pabillo has been a vocal advocate against destructive mining practices, working tirelessly to protect both the environment and the rights of indigenous communities.⁴⁴ Fr. Flavie Villanueva, SVD – Founder of *Program Paghilom*, works with the families of extrajudicial killing victims under the "war on drugs," offering them psycho-spiritual healing and support.⁴⁵ Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB – A Benedictine nun and activist, continues to fight for women's rights, education, and social justice through theological advocacy and public engagement.⁴⁶ These church leaders remind us that faith, when lived out in action, becomes a powerful force for societal transformation.

There are still men and women who quietly and faithfully work to uplift the lives of the poor, standing against corruption, and advocating for social justice and integrity. In following the path of Jesus, they embody His compassion and courage—truly, they are the ones of whom Pilate's words can be rightly spoken: "Behold the (Wo)Man!"

Conclusion

In this exegetical-theological essay, we examined the literary context of John 19:5, where Pilate declares, "Ecce Homo." Then we explored the person of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John, focusing on how He becomes the manifestation of YHWH as revealed in the Old Testament. With Pilate's exclamation of Jesus as *Ecce Homo* in John 19:5, we can say that the text is more than a historical utterance by a hesitant Roman governor; it is a profound theological proclamation that encapsulates the identity of Jesus as the divine manifestation of YHWH and the perfection of humanity revealed in vulnerability and suffering. In Pilate's fraught presentation, Jesus is not merely the victim of human injustice but the revelation of a God who chooses solidarity with the wounded and oppressed.

With this, we can say that in the face of political betrayal and religious rejection, Jesus stands as the incarnate Word, embodying both divine power and human frailty. He reveals a kingship not built on domination, but on sacrificial love. His humiliation, crowned with thorns and clothed in a mocking robe, ironically proclaims his true glory: a Messiah who reigns not through coercion, but through the self-giving love that conquers death itself.

⁴³ See Patricia Julianne Escaño, "Justice and Generosity Are Inseparable—Cardinal Tagle," *CBCPNews*, August 19, 2021, <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/justice-and-generosity-are-inseparable-cardinal-tagle/>. See also Caritas Philippines, "Caritas Philippines Extends Congratulations and Prayers to New Filipino Cardinal," December 2024, <https://caritas.org.ph/caritas-philippines-extends-congratulations-and-prayers-to-new-filipino-cardinal/.UCA> [News+3](#)

⁴⁴ See Bishop Broderick Pabillo, "Palawan Bishops Seek 25-Year Mining Moratorium," *CBCPNews*, November 29, 2024, <https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/palawan-bishops-urge-mining-moratorium/>.

⁴⁵ See Arnold Janssen Foundation, "Program Paghilom: Healing for Families of EJK Victims," accessed April 20, 2025, <https://rcam.org/7341-2/>.

⁴⁶ See Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, "NunSense: The Spiritual Journey of a Feminist Activist Nun," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 8, 2012, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/25483/celebrating-women-writers-on-womens-month>.

Now the question is: What significant insights can we gain to deepen one's relationship with Jesus Christ—the center of devotion promoted through the *Ecce Homo*? Our devotion to the *Ecce Homo* invites a response beyond passive veneration. It calls each of us to contemplate and embody the same spirit of compassion, resilience, and hope amid the sufferings of the present age. As we behold Jesus, the Man, we are challenged to become men and women of hope, agents of justice, and witnesses to the promises of God fulfilled in Christ.

So every time we gaze upon the image of the *Ecce Homo*—that same image brought to the Philippines in 1521, though not as popular as the Santo Niño de Cebu—it should remind us of the deeper meaning embedded in John's Passion narrative: Christ as the manifestation of God's enduring solidarity with the marginalized and the afflicted. The *Ecce Homo* serves both as a mirror and a mission: a mirror revealing the brokenness yet dignity of humanity redeemed by Christ, and a mission to proclaim, by our lives, that God's love continues to heal and transform the world.

Thus, the *Ecce Homo* is not merely a historical relic or a devotional object; it is a living proclamation of hope in God's promise of justice and righteousness. In gazing upon the suffering Christ, we are summoned to live as authentic reflections of His life—until it may be said of us, too: "*Behold the (Wo)Man!*" Through this, the devotion to the *Ecce Homo* is kept ever alive, speaking powerfully to the struggles and aspirations of every devotee.

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