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Pacquiao: Defeat strengthened my faith in God

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MANILA, Philippines -- Filipino world boxing champion Manny Pacquiao's controversial loss to Timothy Bradley in Saturday's fight in Las Vegas might have cost him his World Boxing Organization welterweight title, but the dethroned champ said it has also brought him closer to God [1].

Speaking to interviewers of Filipino TV show "The Buzz" just after the fight, Pacquiao said he was "OK" and thankful to God he was not hurt.

"My feelings weren't hurt because I have God and I believe God has a good plan for me," the former champion said in Tagalog [2] after suffering his fourth career loss.

"I am close to God. My faith is 100 percent, and it even increased," he continued.

Pacquiao, 33, is the first eight-division World Boxing Organization champion. He has won six world titles and is the first boxer to win the lineal championship [3] in four different weight classes.

On Saturday (Sunday in Manila), he lost to Bradley, 28, in a split decision at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, drawing outrage and disbelief [4]. Judges C.J. Ross and Duane Ford scored the fight 115-113 in favor of Bradley. The third judge, Jerry Roth, decided Pacquiao beat Bradley 115-113.

Here and abroad, Pacquiao fans are pushing for a rematch with Bradley, insisting the champ had been "robbed" of victory [5].

Pacquiao's mother, Dionisia Pacquiao, reportedly fainted after hearing Bradley declared the winner while watching the fight in her home in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. She is now leading demands for a rematch [6].

But Pacquiao, a Catholic who has been in Bible study with an evangelical Christian pastor, is moving on, echoing praises for God and declaring his faith. He described his spiritual awakening to members of the Jesus is Lord Church [7], an evangelical group led by Filipino founder Eduardo "Brother Eddie" Villanueva.

Bishop Dinualdo Gutierrez of Marbel told *NCR* [8] this spiritual journey began six months ago with a dream and developed with Bible studies under coaching of a born-again pastor.

Marbel is Pacquiao's home diocese. Pacquiao, who is the House representative [9] for the Sarangani Province, has publicly committed to becoming a better husband and father and turn away from drinking, gambling and marital infidelity.

The day after the fight, he was seen joining a thanksgiving Mass [10] on Sunday morning at his hotel without his champion's belt. With his head bowed, he recited a prayer thanking God for his and Bradley's safety. In Tagalog, he appealed to fellow Filipinos: "Let's not get dismayed" by defeat, which he described as "just a small test for us."

Pacquiao watchers, however, wonder [11] whether his religious preoccupation and pronouncements on moral issues, such as gay relationships, have weakened his punches, distracted his training and damaged relations with the public.

On Twitter [12], his critics blamed these for the "shocking" defeat.

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