

Church wants boxer Manny Pacquiao as Bible reading advocate

N.J. Viehland | Mar. 7, 2012



Congressman Manny Pacquiao, right, with Fr. Teresito Soganub at the Philippines House of Representatives (Courtesy of Fr. Teresito Soganub)

MANILA, Philippines -- The Philippines church's tapping of boxing champion Manny Pacquiao as an advocate for Bible reading has drawn both criticism of the use of the boxer's celebrity and support for bringing the Bible to the public eye.

At the end of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines plenary assembly in January, Auxiliary Bishop Pablo David of San Fernando, chairman of the [Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate](#) [1], announced a plan to invite Pacquiao to help promote Bible reading among Filipinos after [news broke of the boxer's conversion](#). [2]

"My concept was to invite Manny Pacquiao to partner with [the commission] in promotion of Bible reading among Catholics because he says he's now a Bible-reading Catholic," David said.

[Pacquiao's official website](#) [3] has begun to post Gospel verses. Monday's verse was from Matthew's Gospel: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Pacquiao's website also includes verses linked to the Devotionals section of [EWTN](#) [4].

David said he was inspired by Denver Broncos quarterback [Tim Tebow](#) [5], who he said provides a good example to young people in the United States.

"He's not ashamed of his faith," David said. "He talks about his faith candidly, how it makes a difference in his life. What Manny is doing is parallel to what Tim Tebow is doing in the United States, except if [Pacquiao] is Catholic, he'll have a stronger impact among Catholics."

[Philippine Star](#) columnist [William Esposito](#) [6] said Pacquiao's story of conversion through a dream is too much like Hollywood and could send the wrong signals to people, especially in comparing Pacquiao to Tebow.

"Tebow is a well-known devout Catholic," Esposito writes. "Therein lies a big difference. Manny Pacquiao is hounded by several controversies, which include marital problems."

David said Pacquiao should not be judged for admitting to infidelity and gambling.

"He's talking about a conversion experience and he's humbly admitted on TV that he became a womanizer and gambler -- that he was almost addicted to it and that it was wrecking his family -- but that reading the Bible helped him to get a grip and to turn his life around," David said.

Jelly Ablan, a Bible group leader in Our Lady of the Pentecost Parish, told *NCR* she thought it was a good idea to engage Pacquiao, who could get people thinking about reading the Bible.

Pacquiao, 33, began his career as professional boxer at 16 years old and has won [38 of 54 victories by knockout](#) [7]. He is also the elected House Representative of Sarangani Province, southern Philippines.

In an interview in January, Pacquiao described a "religious experience" in a dream where he was in the middle of a dark forest after losing his way. He prayed to God in desperation, and when God replied by asking him what he was running away from, he started sobbing.

He saw a light that led him out of the dark forest and said he woke up with his pillow wet with tears. The boxer said he resolved then to stop his vices of womanizing and gambling that were destroying his family and took to reading the Bible.

Although Pacquiao has not yet gotten in touch with David, the boxer replied to the bishop's invitation [on his House website](#) [8].

"With all my heart and my soul, I am accepting the daunting task," Pacquiao wrote.

Although Pacquiao's celebrity is a perk, David said the boxer is not "being used, because he allows it. We're asking of our faith ... just inviting."

Pacquiao has considered leaving boxing, but said in late February that his son wants him to [fight champion Floyd Mayweather Jr. before he retires](#) [9].

May They Be One

David said his Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate is looking for assistance from Pacquiao and others for its May They Be One campaign, which, along with [the Philippine Bible Society](#) [10], seeks to distribute 5 million Bibles at a subsidized cost of 50 pesos (\$1.17) through 2013.

Campaign organizers say they believe reading and applying the Gospel to one's life leads to transformation of individuals and promotes unity among family and community members, helping to improve society as a whole.

Aside from selling the Bibles at half the cost of production, about 20 percent of the publication would be given for free through parish priests or pastors.

David said no studies have been done on Bible readership among the country's more than 70 million Catholics and estimates only about 4 percent of the 50,000 people in his parish read the Bible.

He said Filipino Catholics are not normally inclined to read the Bible, thinking they cannot interpret it themselves.

"They need a priest to preach about this or they hear it from the priest or the lectors," he said.

The commission is also distributing audio Bibles and promoting its [Handwritten "Unity" Bible project](#) [11].

David said the commission is working to implement recommendations of [Verbum Domini \(Word of the Lord\)](#) [12], the apostolic exhortation synthesizing the proceedings of the 2008 Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.

Participants in the February national biblical workshop also committed to organize seminars, symposiums, retreats and workshops for the clergy, religious and lay pastoral workers at the regional, sub-regional and diocesan levels.

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[1] <http://ecba-cbcp.com/>

[2]

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cts=133097282cbnnews.com%2Fsports%2F01%2F13%2F12%2Fpacquiao-encounter-god-changed-me&ei=kghVT_2hJs-ViAekp73LCw&usg=AFQjCNHRqaPVnFCVy27ubcMgK-0yxub1gQ&sig2=IbpFog6E1cVoUd0-voTg9Q

[3] <http://www.mp8.ph/news/category/mp8-exclusive-news>

[4] <http://www.ewtn.com/>

[5] <http://www.timtebow.com/>

[6] <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=779025&publicationSubCategoryId=64>

[7] http://boxrec.com/list_bouts.php?human_id=006129&cat=boxer

[8] <http://mannypacquiao.com/articles/pacman-finds-inner-peace-and-happiness>

[9] <http://www.boxingscene.com/pacquiao-my-son-wants-me-fight-mayweather-retire--49849>

[10] http://www.bible.org.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=196&Itemid=123

[11] <http://www.ecba-cbcp.com/handwrittenunitybible.htm>

[12] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html

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