

## “COVENANT ON HONEST LIVING: FIT OR FLOP”

ORA Administrative Research 2015-2016

Presented February 17, 2017

St. John Macias Hall, Aquinas University of Legazpi

### INTRODUCTION.

When Fr. Ramonclaro G. Mendez, OP was Rector and President of Aquinas University of Legazpi, he coined the tagline, “SOAR HIGH”. Not too long after that, another neighboring educational institution took the cue and emblazoned in front of their campus a sign saying “SOAR HIGHER”. Was this a happy case of coincidence? Maybe. The Rector and author of the tagline, however, was laughing silently albeit quite victoriously because unbeknownst to many, “SOAR” was meant to be an acronym for “Spirit Of Aquinas Rising”. Therefore, when another institution used it, that institution only promoted, quite unwittingly, Aquinas University.

When Fr. Ernesto M. Arceo, OP succeeded Fr. Mendez as rector and president, a new tagline was introduced -“Nurturing the mind, enriching the spirit”. It was not merely an ambitious attempt to catch the attention of prospective students, assure their parents and hopefully drum up enrollment. Neither was it a clever ploy to sound profound and noble. It proclaimed to the public the university’s serious commitment not only to academic learning but also to moral formation. The Rector has been quite earnest in tirelessly reminding the community of learners that the education we provide at Aquinas must form a critical mind and an honest heart.

### 1. HISTORY

At the outset of his first term as Rector and President of Aquinas University, Fr. Ernesto M. Arceo, OP made a keen observation that left a deep mark in the heart of the community. He noted that many of our leaders whose integrity has been questioned are products of Catholic Schools.

On August 20, 2012, ABS-CBN posted a list of the “five most talked about plagiarism scandals in the Philippines”.<sup>1</sup> They were:

- 1.1 Sen. Tito Sotto’s speech on the Reproductive Health Bill
- 1.2 Department of Tourism’s campaign, “It’s More Fun in the Philippines”
- 1.3 SC Justice Mariano del Castillo’s ruling on comfort women
- 1.4 Manuel V. Pangilinan’s Graduation Speech at Ateneo in 2010
- 1.5 Department of Tourism’s “Pilipinas Kay Ganda” logo.

Corrupt leaders will engender a corrupt people. The rampant and blatant cases of corruption are no longer a matter of surprise. Sadly, the whole world has come to know and has seen the surveys showing the Philippines as ranking highly among the most corrupt countries in the world.

Transparency International ranked the Philippines as the 85<sup>th</sup> out of 175 most corrupt countries surveyed in 2014.<sup>2</sup> It further gave our country a 22% percentile rank in the area of control of corruption in 2010.

Not too long after his installation as Rector, Fr. Arceo asked Fr. Roberto G. Reyes, the VP for Religious Affairs, to constitute a Committee on Honesty, which would promote the virtue through various campaigns and programs. Fr. Reyes called an initial meeting of the Committee on Honesty on January 29, 2013 at the ORA Conference Room. People from the various sectors of the University Community were invited, namely:

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/lifestyle/08/20/12/list-5-most-talked-about-plagiarism-scandals-ph>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.transparency.org/country#PHL>

1. Dr. Susana Cabredo - VP for Academic Affairs
2. Mr. Jesus Barizo - Director of Student Services
3. Prof. Patrick Gerard G. Paulino - Director of Center for Religious Education
4. Ms. Salvacion Fernandez - Former Director of Finance, Resource and Management Office
5. Ms. Michelle Barbacena - H.S. Teacher
6. Mr. Gerry Bajaro - Program Chair for Social Science
7. Ms. Angelica Guillermo - President of Student Council

A major resolution of that meeting was to draft a “Covenant of Honesty” which was to be signed and offered by all students, Employees and Administrators of the school at the Mass of the Holy Spirit of the following school year.<sup>3</sup> Drafting the Covenant did not take long. Eventually, it came out as the “Covenant of Honest Living”.<sup>4</sup>

On March 22, 2013 the Chairman of the Committee on Honesty circulated a memo to all heads of offices and Academic Heads of the university<sup>5</sup>. The Memo contained recommendations on how to more effectively prepare students and employees for the whole-hearted signing of the Covenant in the academic year 2013-2014. With the help of Religious Education teachers, the Covenant was introduced and discussed at RE classes, both in the secondary and the tertiary level.

Copies of the Covenant were distributed to give the entire community an opportunity to reflect on the commitment they were about to make. At the Mass of the Holy Spirit, signed Covenants were offered and the Covenant was read aloud after communion. This was repeated in the succeeding school years (2014-2016).

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

When the Committee on Truth & Honesty initiated the signing of the Covenant on Honest Living its goal was to get 100% of the Aquinas Community (Employees and Students) to sign the Covenant on Honest Living. Moreover, the Committee hoped that

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2

the act of signing would ritualize a commitment to honesty, which the community should have been living out in the first place. Ultimately, the ritual would contribute, to a great extent, to the development of a culture of truth and honesty.

After two years of implementation, a few questions arise:

- 2.1 Did 100% of the community sign the “Covenant of Honest Living” in the school year 2013-2014? Did 100% of the community sign the “Covenant of Honest Living” in the school year 2014-2015?
- 2.2 How has the signing of the Covenant affected the cases of cheating in class, plagiarism and other honesty issues in school?
- 2.3 What other strategies can be done to improve the effectiveness of the Covenant and the advocacy on Truth and Honesty in general?

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It seemed that the use of a survey-questionnaire was the best strategy to answer the questions forwarded above. Since it would be too expensive and too time consuming to ask each member of the community to answer the questionnaire, the SLOVIN’S FORMULA was used to determine how many individuals per department would be asked to be respondents in the survey.<sup>6</sup>The breakdown of the respondents were as follows:

a. High School	184
b. Tertiary	232
c. Non-acad	31
d. Teaching staff	37
e. Administrators	9
Total	493

Below is the actual questionnaire, which has been distributed to the Aquinas community in August of 2015.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE: “Covenant on Honest Living”

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<sup>6</sup>Thanks to Dr. Alvin Sario who recommended and used the Slovin’s formula in computing the distribution of the questionnaire to students.

*Dear Administrator/Employee/Student,*

*We launched our advocacy on Truth and Honesty in 2013 with the signing of the Covenant on Honest Living and offering of the same at the Mass of the Holy Spirit. May I ask for your help in assessing its effectiveness by answering the following questions as honestly and sincerely as you can. Be assured that strict confidentiality will be maintained. Thank you very much for your indulgence. Fr. Robi Reyes, OP*

1. I am a  Student  Teaching Employee  
 Non-Academic Employee  Administrator
  
2. Did you sign the Covenant of Honest Living in SY 2013-2014? \_\_\_\_\_ Did you sign the Covenant of Honest Living in SY 2014-2015? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. If you answered “yes” in #2, what changes has signing of the Covenant effected in your life? (✓ = yes; ✗ = no)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I have been honest and truthful at all times, in thought, word and deed.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I have avoided all forms of cheating, especially in the classroom.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I have been tactful and sensitive in the practice of truth and honesty.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I have respected and preserved the good name of people, offices and institutions especially in the use of social networks and other forms of communication.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I have respected the intellectual rights of others through just and truthful acknowledgement of authors and their work.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I have accepted whole-heartedly the consequences of any and all infractions against truth and honesty.
  
4. If you answered “no” in #2, state reason/s for not signing.
  
5. What changes have you encountered in the school community (*in terms of the level of honesty*) since we started signing the Covenant of Honest Living in 2013?
  
6. How would you rate the effectiveness of signing the Covenant? \_\_\_\_\_  
 (1- ineffective; 2 - minimal effect; 3 - noticeable effect;  
 4 - effective; 5 - highly effective)
  
7. Can you recommend anything to make the Covenant more effective?

#### 4. RESEARCH OUTPUT

It took a while before the questionnaires were tabulated and interpreted. Not being a statistician, the author had to seek the help of those who had the knowledge and training in handling statistical data. Professor Alvin Sario, being a researcher was asked to determine the numbers of respondents from each category using the Slovin's Formula. The accomplished questionnaires were actually given to the Psychological Statistics (Psych 204) class of Dean Marytina Bonganay, from the College of Arts, Sciences and Education.<sup>7</sup> Below are the salient findings:

4.1 On the SIGNING of the Covenant (q. 2), the data showed that:

4.1.1 In SY 2013-2014, 287/493 or 58% of the respondents signed the Covenant.

4.1.2 In SY 2014-2015, 251/493 or 50% of the respondents signed the Covenant.<sup>8</sup>

During the two years covered by the survey, an average of 54% signed the Covenant of Honest Living. Therefore 46% did not sign the Covenant on Honest Living, which begs the question:

- a. Did the respondents not care about promoting honesty in the university?
- b. Did they think that the community was honest enough and the covenant inane?
- c. Did they not see the value in "signing" the Covenant? The answer to this can be found in #4.2.3.
- d. If 46% of the respondents did not even care to sign the Covenant, can we consider the responses of the 54% respondents as reliable?

4.2 On the effectiveness of the signing of the Covenant of Honest Living (q. 6),

4.2.1. 130/493 or 26% of the respondents judged that the signing of the Covenant has minimal effect,

4.2.2 118/493 or 24% of the respondents judged that the signing has a noticeable effect.

4.2.3 115/493 or 24% of the respondents judged that the signing of the Covenant is ineffective.

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<sup>7</sup>Many thanks to the students of Psych 204 class under Ms. Marytina Bonganay, SY 2015-2016 for their collaborative effort in collating, tabulating and interpreting the data from the questionnaire.

<sup>8</sup>See Research Data, p. 11-25.

4.2.4 33/493 or almost 7% of the respondents did not answer.<sup>9</sup>

It would be important, at this point, to distinguish that the subject in question here is the “signing” of the covenant, and not the “Covenant” itself.

The author believes though that it would be safe to join together the 24% who think the signing of the Covenant to be “ineffective”, the 26% who feel that it has minimal effect and the 7% of the respondents who did not answer. Hence, it could be generally said that 57% of the respondents feel that the signing of the Covenant is either ineffective or has minimal effect. This, however, does not imply that the respondents feel that the Covenant itself or the advocacy for honesty or the virtue itself of honesty is ineffective.

4.3 On CHANGES encountered in the community after the signing of the Covenant (q. 5),

4.3.1 333/493 or 67.5% of the respondents have not encountered any change.

4.3.1 123/493 or 25% of the respondents judge that honesty has improved.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, it seems that the signing of the Covenant has not effected any changes in the community. This, however, does not at all mean that the community has been dishonest. Neither does it mean the opposite. It only means that the signing of the Covenant is perceived to have had a **very negligible effect** on the community.

Furthermore, these results need not discourage the administrators from looking for other means or devising other strategies to continually promote honest living, which, in reality, is more important than the signing of the Covenant. Whether the community is apathetic to the signing of the Covenant or to the Covenant itself, or even worse, to the advocacy on honesty, the challenge is laid down before the members of the Aquinas community - to continue promoting honesty as an essential christian value.

4.4 On the changes inspired by the signing of the COVENANT of Honest Living, based on the points of the Covenant, the responses were as follows:

4.4.1 “I have been honest and truthful at all times in thought, word and deed, hence contributing to the propagation of a culture of honesty among all Aquinians.”

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<sup>9</sup>See Figure 2, Table 5, Figure 5 of survey results.

<sup>10</sup>See Table 7 and Figure 7.

YES - 146 or 30%

NO - 347 or 70%

That 70% of the community admits to having been dishonest and untrue at some level and at some time is startling at first. However, there is reason to rejoice in that while 70% of the respondents have been dishonest, they admit their failure. They are, in fact, “honest about their dishonesty”.

Furthermore, the author believes that the inclusion of the adverb “*at all times*” can be the reason for a staggering 70% “*no*” response. “*At all times*” proposes an absolute statement demanding a most stringent gauge. A respondent, for example, may have told a superficial white lie or may have been slightly dishonest at some point and would have felt the obligation to answer “no” to this question. One might then ask, does this point reflect faithfully the honesty level of Aquinians? One might further infer that while 70% of the Aquinian community may not be honest all the time, they may be honest most of the time. Finally, one might surmise that the acts of dishonesty of which this 70% are accusing themselves are neither serious nor severely damaging.

4.4.2 “I have avoided all forms of cheating, especially in the class room.”

YES - 147 or 30%

NO - 346 or 70%

A similar observation can be made about the responses to this point of the survey, hence, the 70% “*no*” response. The author is certain that had the questionnaire provided other responses such as, “sometimes, most of the time, etc.” the results would not have been as dispiriting.

4.4.3 “I have been tactful and sensitive in the practice of truth and honesty.”

YES - 247 or 50%

NO - 246 or 50%

The responses to this point only confirm the explanation to the responses to the first two points above (4.4.1 and 4.4.2). Note that this provision is not stated in an absolute way, hence evoking a more acceptable and realistic response.

4.4.4 “I have respected and preserved the good name of people, offices and institutions especially in the use of social networks and other forms of communication.”

YES - 357 or 72%

NO - 136 or 28%

4.4.5 “I have respected the intellectual rights of others, through just and truthful acknowledgement of authors and their work.”

YES - 384 or 78%

NO - 109 or 22%

Here, it seems, we find a more faithful reflection of the level of honesty of Aquinians, i.e., that 78% of Aquinians respect and give high value to authors' intellectual rights. Would it be true to say then that to most Aquinians, cheating in exams would be more understandable than non-acknowledgment of authors and their work? Would it likewise be true to infer that to 72% - 78% of Aquinians, dishonesty becomes grave when it affects other people? That it is tolerable to be dishonest as long as it does not damage the names or affect the lives and work of other people.

4.4.6 "I have accepted whole-heartedly the consequences of any and all infractions against truth and honesty."

YES - 357 or 72%

NO - 136 or 28%

While 70% admit that they havenot been honest and truthful (4.4.1 and 4.4.2), 72% are responsible enough to accept the consequences of their dishonesty. Below are some possible implications:

- a. That 70 - 72% of Aquinians consider some actions of dishonesty such as cheating in quizzes and exams as petty and negligible.
- b. That 72% of Aquinians are ready to face the consequences of their dishonest actions.

4.5 On the RECOMMENDATIONS to make the Covenant more effective (q. 7),

4.5.1 345/493 or 70% of the respondents offered no recommendation.

4.5.2 45/493 or 9% recommended seminars and/or religious activities.

4.5.3 24/493 or 5% recommended imposing punishment. <sup>11</sup>

Noticeably, among the 4 (out of 5) groups of respondents, a vast majority (70%) of the respondents offered no recommendation to make the Covenant more effective.

Possible implications may be that:

- a) They feel that nothing can be done or needs to be done to improve the Covenant.

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<sup>11</sup>See Table 6 and Figure 6 of Research Data.

b) 70% of the respondents may be simply apathetic to the Covenant itself or the exercise of signing the covenant. It is the hope of the author, however, that even if this were true, they still value the advocacy or the development of the virtue of honesty itself. It would be a disturbing state of affairs if the Aquinas community no longer cared for honesty as an advocacy or virtue.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we answer two of the three questions posted on page 4:

5.1. Did 100% of the community sign the “Covenant of Honest Living” in the school year 2013-2014? 58 % signed the covenant on SY 2013-2014. Did 100% of the community sign the “Covenant of Honest Living” in the school year 2014-2015? 50% signed the covenant on SY 2014-2015.

For one reason or another, 46% of the AUL Community did not seem to care for the signing of the covenant or the covenant itself. However, it does not mean that the 46% did not care for the value of honesty. This is evident in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> points of the covenant, where Aquinians manifest a strong responsibility to be honest in ways that affect other people.

5.2 How has the signing of the Covenant affected the cases of cheating in class, plagiarism and other honesty issues in school? The survey shows that 67.5 % of the respondents did not encounter any change in the community after the signing of the Covenant.

5.3 Other Conclusions:

5.3.1 Those who did not sign the Covenant may have felt self-righteous about it and its provisions quite a tall order for them to fill.

5.3.2 Others may not have felt too comfortable about ritualizing the covenant, without detriment to the values of truth and honesty.

5.3.3 Aquinians seem to distinguish cheating in class or other minor exams as a lighter form of dishonesty than non-acknowledgement of authors and their work.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

On page 4, the question states: *What other strategies can be done to improve the effectiveness of the Covenant and the advocacy on Truth and Honesty in general?*

In the SY 2015-2016, having learned the lessons of the previous two years, less energy was poured into the signing of the Covenant on Honest Living. It was, however, still read publicly by the entire AUL community at the Mass of the Holy Spirit. On June 13, 2016, at the Mass of the Holy Spirit, the Covenant was again read in public. Apparently, this would be the first clearest recommendation to give flesh to the advocacy on Truth and Honesty - to read aloud the Covenant at the Mass of the Holy Spirit and whenever appropriate. In doing so, the community is reminded of their noble commitment to Truth.

Secondly, whenever possible and opportune, engaging and lively discussions on truth and honesty in all classes, especially in Religious Education is highly recommended. By discussion is meant the free flowing and unfettered exchange of ideas, hopefully being guided by the Facilitator to a clearer understanding of the virtue of honesty and its importance in human life. Lectures on the topic can also be given to groups of people, at special celebrations like the University Week or “*Buwan ng Wika*”, etc.

Finally, it is the hope of the author that heroic acts of honesty be recognized and commended publicly by the concerned persons and offices to shed light on the grace of God moving ordinary people to become “honest heroes” who could inspire others to do the same.



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**APPENDIX I**

January 29, 2013

To: Dr. Susana Cabredo  
Mr. Jesus Barizo  
Prof. Patrick Gerard G. Paulino  
Ms. Salvacion Fernandez  
Ms. Michelle Barbacena  
Mr. Gerry Bajaro  
Ms. Angelica Guillermo

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of Fr. Ernesto M. Arceo, OP, Rector and President of AUL, may I thank you for your generosity in accepting to be a member of AUL's COMMITTEE ON HONESTY.

May I, then, invite you to an initial meeting on February 4, 2013, 9:30 am, at the ORA conference room.

Agenda for the meeting are:

1. Program on Honesty
  - a. Covenant drafting (for Students, Employees and Admin)
  - b. Plans for covenant signing at Mass of the Holy Spirit
  - c. Preparatory Activities in classroom, Pagtais, etc.
  - d. Follow up activities
  - e. Rewards and Sanctions
2. Program for Election Awareness – collaborative
  - a. For Elementary
  - b. For High School
  - c. For College
  - d. For GS and Law
  - e. For Employees
  - f. For Admin
3. Program for Internet Ethics
4. Other matters

- Classroom activities for HS and Elem
- Discussion Fora for college and Grad School

Thank you very much for your generosity.

**FR. ROBERTO G. REYES, OP**  
Vice President for Religious Affairs

*Vita Veritatis et Amoris ex Gratitude*

*In a life of Truth and of Love out of Gratitude*

## Covenant on Honest Living

I, \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_, a bona fide member of Aquinas Community, a disciple of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Dominic de Guzman, a follower of the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and a believer of God who is a God of LOVE and TRUTH, do hereby commit myself to this Covenant of Honesty. In doing so, I promise

That I will be honest and truthful at all times in thought, word and deed, hence contributing to the propagation of a culture of honesty among all Aquinians.

That I will particularly avoid all forms of cheating, especially in the classroom.

That I will be tactful and sensitive in the practice of truth and honesty.

That I will respect and preserve the good name of people, offices and institutions especially in the use of social networks and other forms of communication.

That I will always respect the intellectual rights of others, through just and truthful acknowledgement of authors and their work.

That I will accept whole-heartedly the consequences of any and all infractions against truth and honesty.

May the God of TRUTH who gave me His Son, through His Spirit, sustain me in a life of Truth and Love.

So help me God.

*Vita Veritatis et Amoris ex Gratitudine*



*In a life of Truth and of Love out of Gratitude*

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To the Aquinian Community  
Through the Heads of Offices, Academic Heads

March 22, 2013

Peace!

One of the major concrete projects adopted by the Committee on Truth & Honesty is the signing of a Covenant on Truth & Honesty by the entire AQ Community, to be done at the Mass of the Holy Spirit come June. The purpose of this activity is to provide a concrete rite and action by which the entire community would commit itself to the living of Truth & Honesty in the campus and hopefully outside the gates of Aquinas as well.

Needless to say that we need to thoroughly prepare ourselves so that we can truly imbibe this noble and highly relevant virtue. Therefore, as soon as the next school year begins, may I enjoin you to be one with the Committee on Truth & Honesty in taking steps to prepare ourselves for what we are about to embark on.

Below are some recommendations which might contribute to a more effective preparation:

1. Inform students and employees regarding our concerted efforts in our advocacy for truth and honesty.
2. Read, analyse and reflect on the contents of the covenant on Honesty so that we can truly and sincerely commit ourselves as a community to this noble ideal.
3. Discuss with students and staff ways of living out the virtue of Truth and honesty.
4. Throughout the year, publicly commend and/or reward acts of truth and honesty and the persons who perform them. Impose punishments on any and all forms of lies and dishonesty, while as much as possible preserving the dignity of those who commit them.
5. Choose to be honest because it is right and Godly.

If you have any suggestions and/or concerns, please do not hesitate to come and talk to us. Thank you very much for your undying support and cooperation.

noted:

FR. ROBERTO G. REYES, OP  
Committee on Truth & Honesty, Chairman

FR. ERNESTO M. ARCEO. OP