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Living Forward: Anabaptism at 500 Essay Contest

Ever since early childhood, growing up in the Bruderhof, an Anabaptist community founded in the teachings of Jesus and the example of the Early Christians, I was taught that faith is not static. I grew up hearing about the thousands early anabaptist martyrs such as Felix Manz and Dirk Willems who felt called to give up their lives in pursuit of Biblical truth, truth that the Catholic church did not offer. My grandfather, who came from the Hutterite tradition, held the same strong conviction as his forefathers—a belief that Christianity must be lived out in community, in simplicity, and with a profound commitment to peace and justice. This did not mean that he was complacent with his faith, however. Rather, when he was in his late teens he moved from his home in family in Canada to join a different anabaptist church, moved by the questions that this new church was asking of him. These Anabaptist values are not just traditions passed down like heirlooms; they were—and are—timeless convictions meant to be questioned, lived, and wrestled with in every generation.

One of the most distinctive values I have come to appreciate in the Anabaptist tradition is the act of asking questions. This may sound simplistic, but in a world where both religious and secular institutions often prize certainty and instant gratification, the Anabaptist willingness to question the status quo is both radical and essential. Without questions, a church can quickly become a culture—comfortable, safe, and disconnected from the radical call of Jesus. To live solely for Christ, we must always be asking: *Are we living in alignment with His teachings? Have we become too settled in our ways? What does discipleship look like today?*

Currently, I am studying abroad in Italy—in Orvieto, a small town steeped in Catholic tradition and history. Living at the heart of Catholicism has given me a fresh perspective on my own faith. I have been attending Mass with other American study abroad students regularly at San Giovenale, a thousand-year-old church on the other side of town. At first, I went out of curiosity to learn more about the culture. I don't speak Italian fluently, and yet, one day, during the reading of 1 Corinthians 15:55—“*Dov'è, o morte, la tua vittoria? Dov'è, o morte, il tuo pungiglione?*”—I found myself moved to tears by this sudden recognition of these questions that challenge death and that are at the heart of Christian belief.

That moment was deeply humbling. It reminded me that truth and beauty can be found outside of our own traditions. And yet, I found myself holding back. I could not fully embrace the Catholic Church, despite the emotional and spiritual richness I experienced there. My own questions around Biblical authenticity would not allow me to do so.

Before I left the States, my older sister gave me a copy of the newly released *Anabaptist Community Bible*. As I began reading it, I noticed what made this Bible unique—it included

footnotes from early Anabaptist thinkers, present-day scholars, and community members—who were not afraid to ask questions. While these margin notes provided context to what I was reading, they did not always offer answers; instead, they invited deeper inquiry. This question asking signaled to me that the Anabaptist tradition is still alive, engaging in a dialogue with our cultural moment and the Word of God.

In a world increasingly divided by ideology, consumerism, and individualism, the Anabaptist church needs to continue asking questions of the status quo, and of themselves. Only then can the Anabaptist church continue to be a haven for seekers and radical question askers. This may take courage, because asking questions is not always easy. Asking questions of ourselves and churches may require us to sacrifice and may cause our popularity to diminish in social circles or even within our own churches. However, Jesus warns us in Luke 6:26 that we should be careful when the world speaks well of us. Imagine churches that do not just read about Jesus but ask serious and life-changing questions about how they can apply His example to their lives. Imagine a new revival of question asking that engulfs the wider church as we know it today much like the Reformation of the 1500s. This all starts with asking questions.