

# Rhizome

Updates from the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1

MARCH 2019

## Visiting Scholars Explore Mennonite Missions in the Chaco

Augustina Altman and Alejandro López, two anthropologists from the University of Buenos Aires, were present on the Goshen College campus during the month of February to continue their research into Mennonite missions in the Chaco region of Argentina. Altman and López drew heavily on the resources of the Mennonite Historical Library and the Mennonite Church USA archives in Elkhart during their five-week research stint in Goshen. They also conducted interviews with former mission workers in the area. Their academic interest is in the role of evangelical missions in indigenous Argentinian communities. The story of

Mennonites in the Chaco has provided a rich context to examine these interactions.

Altman and López's research is unique in a number of ways. First, it explores the initial arrival of Mennonites in Argentina and the very beginning of the mission in the Chaco – areas of study that have largely been unexplored. Second, their research examines not only the effect of Mennonite missions in the Chaco, but also how the missionary experience influenced the North American church. This has led to a particular interest in the stories of single women who served in the mission as well as accounts of missionary children as they

navigated the complexities of their national and ecclesial identities.

Mennonites in the Chaco conducted the first anthropological work that preserved some of the initial records of the history and culture of the Toba and other indigenous people. Their familiarity with these communities enabled them to facilitate the translation of biblical texts and assist in communication between indigenous communities and the Argentine government. However, the turn from a focus on planting Mennonite churches to accompanying the growth of indigenous churches raises questions about how the Mennonite experience with indigenous people shaped the “sending” church and its understanding of mission. “We want to see how these missions changed the way people approach Christianity in the USA.”

Altman and López's research is an invaluable exploration into these questions, and the ISGA is pleased to assist in this study with funding from the Jon and Rhoda Mast family and the Schafer-Friesen Research Fund. Through these resources and support, the Institute hopes that the work of Altman and López will serve the indigenous people of the Chaco as well as the global Anabaptist community.



Alejandro López and Augustina Altman

“We need to learn from the experiences of our brothers and sisters in the global church family, recognizing that we each have strengths and weaknesses that we need to reinforce and improve.”  
- Marcos Orozco



# GAP Translations Completed and Continued

In the spring of 2017, after two years of research and analysis, the ISGA published the [Global Anabaptist Profile](#) (GAP). In December of 2018, the Spanish translation of GAP ([Perfil Anabautista Mundial](#)) was completed. A sociological study of the beliefs and practices of 24 Mennonite World Conference churches, GAP covers a range of topics—from beliefs about the scripture and the Holy Spirit to experiences of persecution

**Perfil Anabautista Mundial:**  
Creencias y prácticas de 24 Convenciones miembros del Congreso Mundial Menonita  
CONRAD KANAGY, ELIZABETH MILLER, Y JOHN D. ROTH

and engagement with politics. Freely accessible online through the [Biblioteca Digital Anabautista](#) or the [ISGA website](#) (or available for purchase in hard copy). *Perfil Anabautista Mundial* is the first translation of GAP. A French version will be coming out later this year. These translations will make the findings of this study available to a much wider audience of Anabaptists around the world.

“[A Unique Opportunity for Greater Unity: Global Anabaptist Profile collects data on the MWC family worldwide.](#)” is a summary of GAP that can be found in the in Mennonite World Conference’s publication, *The Courier*, in the October 2016 issue.

## BiDA Use in Colombia by Eric Martin

As part of our responsibilities as international service workers through Mennonite Mission Network in Colombia, my wife and I have formed a partnership with Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia. We have developed online courses for youth and young adults, covering subjects such as Bible, history, theology, ethics, and church leadership, all through an Anabaptist lens. One of the problems we encountered was how to provide our students

with adequate resources and material in these courses. Then I discovered the [Biblioteca Digital Anabautista](#). It has been an invaluable resource while running these courses since I am easily able to provide readings to study, as well as offer further resources to students who have questions about a certain topic. In each of the classes, we provide a link to the Biblioteca and encourage stu-

dents to check out the resources available there. BiDA has been a real gift to our online program in Colombia. Without something like BiDA it would be impossible for us to provide access to Anabaptist resources for all of our students.



# GAMEO Workshops Global Expansion

In early February, over 20 people gathered from 10 different countries at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) to learn how they might contribute to the global expansion of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online ([GAMEO](#)). The presence of Anabaptist students from around the world at AMBS became the impetus for the ISGA, in partnership with the AMBS library, to organize the first GAMEO Instructional and Writing Workshop. Bringing unique insights from their own contexts along with their ongoing research and study, AMBS students hold a wealth of knowledge about the global Anabaptist church that GAMEO seeks to make accessible.

On a wintery Tuesday evening, John D. Roth, director of the ISGA, presented the vision of GAMEO as a reliable and wide-ranging resource for Anabaptist-related topics, outlining GAMEO's intention to broaden its material on the global church.

Director of Library Services at AMBS, Karl Stutzman, outlined the resources available at the library for developing articles for GAMEO, including the Writer Center which provides a range of services, from input on content and structure to assistance with grammar and editing. Stutzman has also made several stipends available for submitted articles that are approved by the GAMEO editorial committee. "We



Students gather at AMBS, in person and online, to workshop GAMEO articles

want to offer incentives for AMBS students – particularly those who come from around the globe or have international experience – to help put the “global” into GAMEO,” Stutzman said.

Associate Professor of Anabaptist Studies, Jamie Pitts, also provided the opportunity for a GAMEO article to be a part of the final project in his Global Anabaptism class, encouraging his students to see GAMEO as an opportunity to share their research with the wider church. Jason Kauffman, Director of Archives for Mennonite Church USA and current GAMEO board member, was also present and expressed GAMEO's eagerness to work with students in GAMEO's expansion.

Primarily focused on writing biographies and congregational histories, the workshop explained the basic structure for a GAMEO article and explored the points of intersection between students' research and insights with the areas GAMEO is hoping to expand. Visiting scholars Augustina Altman and Alejandro López expressed appreciation for GAMEO in their research and emphasized the importance of this project in opening up new avenues of exploration and study. Going forward, the ISGA and AMBS library hope to build on this energy to increase the participation and representation of the global church in GAMEO.



## More Guests at the ISGA

Mitsuru Ishido, a Brethren in Christ church leader from Tokyo, Japan, spent several days in Goshen recently, exploring the resources of the Mennonite Historical Library and conferring with John D. Roth. Mitsuru is taking a leading role in promoting a deeper understanding of Anabaptist history and theology among the [Mennonite churches in Japan](#) and in helping the various groups stay connected to each other.

# SCHISM OR RENEWAL?

By John D. Roth, director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

In the fall of 1832, Samuel Froehlich, an itinerant Swiss revival preacher, held a series of open meetings in the Bernese region of the Emmental that attracted much attention among the Mennonites living there. As a result of his impassioned preaching, some 60 members of the Mennonite church in Langnau, led by Christen Gerber and Christen Baumgartner, left the congregation. In March of 1835, the group formally organized as the Evangelical Baptism-Minded Church, more commonly known as the *Neutäufer* (or, in North America, the Apostolic Church).

According to a contemporary witness, Samuel Froehlich and his followers were “trying to bring new life into the fellowship, because they saw what a lukewarm condition the *Alttäufer* [Mennonites] were in. To be sure, the external forms were still intact, but there was almost no evidence of an inner spiritual life.”

The story of Samuel Froehlich and the Mennonites in the Emmental is a theme that runs deeply throughout Anabaptist-Mennonite history. From the Mennonite perspective, stories of charismatic

personalities who challenge tradition, stir up dissent and lead break-away groups are part of a long and troubling litany of schisms. Yet from the perspective of the revivalist, the narrative is not about division but is a story of renewal.

What is it that distinguishes a schism from a renewal movement? From the time of the Reformation—itsself a renewal movement that resulted in division—theologians have affirmed the idea of the *ecclesia semper reformanda* (the church always reformed). If the

church is a truly living body, then it will embrace the ongoing transforming movement of the Spirit that continues the work of reform and renewal.

Yet renewal in our tradition has found many expressions. It can, as in the case of the Amish and other Old Order movements, take the form of consciously strengthening the lines of separation from the world that have become blurred. In other instances, renewal challenges boundaries that have become overly rigid and invites members to a new freedom offered by Christ in the unmerited gift of grace. Renewal can celebrate the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit but it can also focus on disciplined practices of communal life, liturgy or spiritual disciplines.

Renewal movements have in common a near universal insistence that they are not importing something new but are appealing to convictions already present in the tradition that has gone out of

focus.

Renewal movements also nearly always involve young people. If the next generation is going to assume responsibilities of leadership, they will want to do so with a vision that is genuinely their own.

Renewal movements often thrive on opposition—a sense that they are a prophetic minority carrying the light that others have lost.

Finally, renewal movements almost always carry with them the shadow side of their own distinctive gift. In the passionate pursuit of a particular conviction, emotion, leader or model of

church, renewal movements can easily wither or implode.

In nearly every part of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church that has experienced growth in recent decades, some form of Spirit-driven

renewal has been the catalyst. In Ethiopia, a branch of the East African Revival known as Heavenly Sunshine sparked the astounding growth of the Meserte Kristos Church; that same revival also led to the

origins of the Kenyan Mennonite Church and brought winds of the Spirit to staid Mennonite churches in eastern Pennsylvania. Charismatic revival has given rise to the JKI church of Indonesia, and, more recently, to a new Mennonite church in Argentina.

Where is renewal happening in the Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in North America today? What does authentic renewal look like? Can renewal happen without schism?

*A version of this editorial was originally published in the December 2018 issue of The Mennonite.*

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