



Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America

By Robert Brenneman

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Why would a gun-wielding, tattoo-bearing "homie" trade in *la vida loca* for a Bible and the buttoned-down lifestyle of an evangelical *hermano* (brother in Christ)? To answer this question, Robert Brenneman interviewed sixty-three former gang members from the "Northern Triangle" of Central America--Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras--most of whom left their gang for evangelicalism. Unlike in the United States, membership in a Central American gang is *hasta la morgue*. But the most common exception to the "morgue rule" is that of conversion or regular participation in an evangelical church. Do gang members who weary of their dangerous lifestyle simply make a rational choice to opt for evangelical religion? Brenneman finds this is only partly the case, for many others report emotional conversions that came unexpectedly, when they found themselves overwhelmed by a sermon, a conversation, or a prayer service. An extensively researched and gritty account, *Homies and Hermanos* sheds light on the nature of youth violence, of religious conversion, and of evangelical churches in Central America.

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Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America By Robert Brenneman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #934552 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Oxford University Press, USA
- Published on: 2011-11-23
- Released on: 2011-11-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x .90" w x 9.20" l, .85 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 312 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"A courageous scholar, Brenneman has undertaken extensive interviews with former members of some of Central America's most lethal street gangs who have converted to evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity...This well-written book reveals much about the appeal of contemporary evangelical churches. It also provides a terrifying picture of an impoverished and exceptionally violent setting." -*The Christian Century*

"The the book is a remarkable study, rigorous in its methodology, thorough in its scope, and penetrating in its insights. As a bonus, it's accessible without dumbing-down and learned without getting wonky." -Rudy Nelson, *Books & Culture*

"A fascinating window into how street-tough gangbangers abandon the vida loca for evangelical Christianity, trading one set of identity markers, community, and mores for another. *Homies and Hermanos* describes how religious conversion provides Central American *pandilleros* with one of the only ways to leave gang life that does not end in the morgue. Beautifully written and compellingly told!"

--Virginia Garrard-Burnett, author of *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983*

"Brenneman provides a new twist in the gang literature: the surprising parallels between emotional rituals and public display of symbols in both the violent gangs and evangelical churches of Central America. These are the poles of attraction in a market for emotional energy, allowing ex-gang members an escape from membership-to-the-death if they show genuine conversion that the gang respects. In this ritual economy, only one powerful ritual can substitute for another. Brenneman's time-oriented, processual approach advances both theory and practice."-- Randall Collins, author of *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*

"Brenneman draws on interviews with former gang members from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras who left gang life for evangelical Christianity."--*The Chronicle Review*

"This is an outstanding book that is well researched and provides a serious and dignified treatment to the religious lives of Central Americans living on the fringes of their societies."--*Sociology of Religion*

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"Shines a light on a side of evangelical Christianity in Latin America that is rarely seen in scholarly literature: gang ministry, gang exit, and gang member conversions to evangelical, and especially Pentecostal, faith...Brenneman's book ought to be the first stop for serious researchers interested in this intersection of topics."--*Religious Studies Review*

About the Author

Robert Brenneman is Assistant Professor of Sociology at St. Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont. He is the author of *Faith and the Foreigner*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alexander Macdougall:

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