



# The Devil Is a Gentleman: Exploring America's Religious Fringe

*J.C. Hallman*

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## **The Devil Is a Gentleman: Exploring America's Religious Fringe** J.C. Hallman

A hundred years ago, the writer and philosopher William James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a seminal work that has inspired generations of scholars and eccentrics alike. James's book argues that the religious spirit in man is best understood through the study of its most extreme forms. *Varieties* was a watershed effort: a bestselling portrait of history's pluralism and a defense of the spiritual quest, in all its guises, against the era's increasingly secular sentiments.

Today, with all the old tensions between skeptics and believers still in place, J. C. Hallman pays homage to James's exploration of offbeat religious movements. But where James relied on the testimony and biographies of prophets and mystics, Hallman travels directly to some of America's newest and most unusual religions, trekking from Druid circles in the mossy hills of northern California to the gleaming mother church of Scientology, from lurid satanic cellars in undisclosed locations to a professional-wrestling ministry in the fundamentalist heart of Texas. Along the way, he participates in a variety of rites and reports on a broad spectrum of beliefs. Eventually Hallman adopts James as his patron saint, spiritual adviser, and intellectual companion on the journey that will culminate in the creation of this book, a compelling combination of adventure and biography, spotted with hair-raising predicaments and rife with poignant portraits of unforgettable characters, including William James himself.

*The Devil Is a Gentleman* maps the spiritual contours of modern American pluralism and examines the life and legacy of one of its most profound architects.

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