



Upton Sinclair

Upton Sinclair was an early 20th-century journalist, novelist, and political/environmental activist whose influence remains evident today.

The seeds of Sinclair's socialistic views germinated in his bifurcated upbringing between near poverty on his father's side and the upper-class affluence of his maternal grandparents.

Although his overriding passion was fighting for the welfare of the working man against the excessively wealthy, Sinclair is best known for his book, *The Jungle*, which exposed the unsanitary and inhumane conditions within Chicago's slaughterhouses. This book prompted the passing of the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and, ultimately, the creation of the federal Food and Drug Administration.

Most of Sinclair's 90-plus books were small polemics garnering few sales, but a series of historical novels did prove successful. In 1941, Sinclair was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his book, *Dragon's Teeth*, which explored the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism.

Sinclair ran several times for political office, and almost won the governorship of California

but, in the words of the Encyclopedia Britannica, he "was defeated by a joint propaganda campaign, orchestrated by the conservative political and business establishment, newspaper moguls, and Hollywood studio bosses, who brazenly portrayed him as an American communist. Using admen, media consultants, and assorted 'dirty tricks,' the anti-Sinclair battle has been called one of the best-orchestrated smear campaigns in American history; bogus interviews were staged and run as legitimate newsreels in movie theatres, a forerunner of 'fake news' and the attack ads on television decades later."¹ Sinclair might have triumphed despite such attacks for — in the words of the U.S. Social Security Administration — "had Sinclair been less intellectually honest and more of a politician, he would likely have become Governor of California."²

There are numerous books and websites offering biographical info on Sinclair, but few ever mention the one book that earns him a place in the Spirits-at-Play Hall of Fame. The quotes below are from that book: *The Profits of Religion*.

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Come, reader, let us put aside prejudice, and the terrors of the cults of the unknown. The power which made us has given us a mind, and the impulse to its use; let us see what can be done with it to rid Earth of its ancient evils.

Life is a process of expansion, of the unfoldment of new powers; driven by that inner impulse which the philosophers of pragmatism call the *élan vital*. Whenever this impulse has its way, there is an emotion of joy; whenever it is balked, there is one of distress. So, pleasure and pain are the guides of life, and the final goal is a condition of free and constantly accelerating growth, in which joy is enduring. The new morality is a morality of joy. It teaches that true pleasure is the end of being, and the test of all righteousness.

To the ordinary man, "Religion" means institutions having fixed dogmas and "revelations," creeds and rituals, with an administering caste claiming supernatural sanction. By such institutions the moral strivings of the race, the affections of childhood, and the aspirations of youth are made the prerogatives and stock in trade of ecclesiastical hierarchies. "Religion" in this sense is a source of income to parasites, and the natural ally of every form of oppression and exploitation.

The first thing brought forth by the study of any religion, ancient or modern, is that it is based upon fear, born of it, fed by it — and that it cultivates the source from which its nourishment is derived.

How to get power and to hold it has been the first object of the thoughts of men from the beginning of time. The most obvious method is by the sword; but this method is uncertain, for any man may take up a sword, and some may succeed with it. It will be found that empires based upon military force alone, however cruel they may be, are not permanent, and therefore not so dangerous to progress; it is only when resistance is paralyzed by the agency of superstition, that the race can be subjected to systems of exploitation for hundreds and even thousands of years. The ancient empires were all priestly empires; the kings ruled because they obeyed the will of the priests, taught to them from childhood as the word of the gods.

In the year 1819 an act of [the English] Parliament was proposed limiting the labor of children 9 years of age to 14 hours a day. This would seem to have been a reasonable provision, likely to have won the approval of Christ; yet the bill was violently opposed by Christian employers, backed by Christian clergymen. It was interfering with freedom of contract, and therefore with the will of Providence; it was anathema to an established Church, whose function was in 1819, as it is in 1918, and was in 1918 B.C., to teach the divine origin and sanction of the prevailing economic order.

I suspect that we should have to go back to the days of the cave-man to find the first lover of the flesh-pots who put a taboo upon meat, and promised supernatural favors to all who would exercise self-control, and instead of consuming their meat themselves, would bring it and lay it upon the sacred griddle, or altar, where the god might come in the night-time and partake of it. Certainly, at any rate, there are few religions of record in which such devices do not appear. The early laws of the Hebrews are more concerned with delicatessen for the priests than with any other subject whatever. ... the priests of Ceylon first present the gifts to the god, and then eat them. Among the Parsees, when a man dies, the relatives must bring four new robes to the priests; if they do this, the priests wear the robes; if they fail to do it, the dead man appears naked before the judgment-throne. ... Among the Episcopalians, a contemporary Christian sect, the sacred juice is that of the grape, and the priest is not allowed to throw away what is left of it, but is ordered "reverently to consume it." In as much as the priest is the sole judge of how much good sherry wine he shall consecrate previous to the ceremony, it is to be expected that the priests of this cult should be lukewarm towards the prohibition movement, and should piously refuse to administer their sacrament with unfermented and uninteresting grape-juice.

So, we see in 20th-century America precisely what we saw in B.C. 20th-century Assyria — a host of worshipers, giving their worldly goods without stint, and a priesthood, made partly of fanatics and

partly of charlatans, conducting a vast enterprise of graft, and harvesting that thing desired of all men, power over the lives and destinies of others.

So little by little I saw my beautiful church for what it was and is: a great capitalist interest, an integral and essential part of a gigantic predatory system. I saw that its ethical and cultural and artistic features, however sincerely they might be meant by individual clergymen, were nothing but a bait, a device to lure the poor into the trap of submission to their exploiters. And as I went on probing into the secret life of the great Metropolis of Mammon, and laying bare its infamies to the world, I saw the attitude of the church to such work; I met, not sympathy and understanding, but sneers and denunciation — until the venerable institution which had once seemed dignified and noble became to me as a sepulcher of corruption.

Clerical celibacy is contrary to nature, a transgression of fundamental instinct. It should be noted that the purpose of this transgression, which pretends to be spiritual, is really economic; it was the means whereby the church machine built up its power through the Middle Ages. The priests had children then, as they have them today; but these children not being recognized, the church machine remained the sole heir of the property of its clergy.

Today the Catholic Church is firmly established and everywhere recognized as one of the main pillars of American capitalism. It has some 15,000 churches, 14,000,000 communicants, and property valued at half a billion dollars [*in 1917*]. Upon this property it pays no taxes, municipal, state or national; which means, quite obviously, that you and I, ... who do pay taxes, furnish the public costs of Catholicism. We pay to have streets paved and lighted and cleaned in front of Catholic churches; we pay to have thieves kept away from them, fires put out in them, records preserved for them — all the services of civilization given to them gratis, and this in a land whose constitution provides that Congress (which includes all state and municipal legislative bodies) "Shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

A book, titled *The Sociological Value of Christianity*, written in 1912 by Professor Georges Chatterton-Hill, of the University of Geneva, is a warning to the rich of the danger they run in giving up their religion and ceasing to support its priests. It explains how "the genius of Christianity has succeeded in making the individual suffering, the individual sacrifices, which are indispensable for the welfare of the collectivity, appear as indispensable for the individual welfare." The learned professor makes plain just what he means by "individual suffering, individual sacrifices"; he means all the horrors of capitalism; and the advantage of Christianity is that it makes you think that by submitting to these horrors you are profiting your own soul. "By making individual salvation depend on the acceptance of suffering, on the voluntary sacrifice of egotistical interests, Christianity adapts the individual to society." And this, as the professor explains, is not an easy thing to do, in a world in which so many people are thinking for themselves. "The only means of causing the rationalized individual to consent to the sacrifice ... is to captivate him with a sufficiently powerful ideal." And the professor shows how beautifully Jesus can be used for this purpose. "Jesus, the so-called humanitarian, never ceased to insist on the necessity of suffering, the desirableness of suffering — of that suffering which a weak and sickly humanitarianism would fain suppress if it could."

Man demands to know the origin of life; it is intolerable for him to be here, and not know how, or whence, or why. He demands the knowledge immediately and finally, and invents innumerable systems and creeds. He makes himself believe them, with fire and torture makes other men believe them; until finally, in the confusion of a million theories, it occurs to him to investigate his instruments, and he makes the discovery that his tools are inadequate, and all their products worthless. His mind is finite, while the thing he seeks is infinite; his knowledge is relative, while the First Cause is absolute. ... It is a fact, on which everyone who wishes to think must be clear, that when you are dealing with absolutes and ultimates, you can prove whatever you want to prove.

Wherever belief and ritual have become the means of livelihood of a class, all innovation will of necessity be taken as an attack upon that class, it will be literally a crime — robbing the priests of their age-long privileges. And of course, they will oppose the robber — using every weapon of terrorism, both of this world and the next. ... The story of the early days of mankind is a sickening record of torture and slaughter in the name of ten thousand butcher-gods.

The wolf of superstition has been driven into its lair, but it has backed away snarling, and it still crouches, watching for a chance to spring. ... It is a fact, the significance of which cannot be exaggerated, that the measure of the civilization which any nation has attained is the extent to which it has curtailed the power of institutionalized religion.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Upton-Sinclair>

² <https://www.ssa.gov/history/sinclair.html>