

THE STATESMAN

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On Campus Seminars:

Nov. 21-22 [Classics of the 21st Century](#)

Dec. 16-17 [The Writings Of Montesquieu](#)

2006

Jan. 27-28 [Money... It's Not Just for Rich People!](#)

May 5-6 [Thomas Jefferson Education Convention](#)

May 25-Jun. 3 [Youth for America! Conferences](#)

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These Plain, Simple Men



By Kira Ellingford

The currents of thought, events, and the affairs of men seem to change their direction and manner as the result of a few men and women. Our history books are full of the kings, warriors, and clergy men who have commanded, fought and preached, but we hear little of the common people who have lived. Part of the reason for this is because it would be impossible for us to record the lives of every person, but there is another reason.

It is because they follow the kings. They fight for the warriors. They listen to the clergy. They are the water rushing through the river beds made by others. They maintain neutrality and go with the flow – because it's easier.

At the beginning of the Spanish Inquisition the people cheered for their king and queen and did all they could to rid themselves of heretics and infidels. They attended the trials and tortures of its victims. But a change took place. Fear replaced their misguided passion. They saw that the inquisition had gone too far. When they realized what was happening they

should have made a stand. They should have been willing to stick out their necks and oppose the proceedings. Instead they hid, they walked quietly, they feared. The people have the power of might. They have the strength of numbers and courage. If they would have only taken a stand! But the result of their quiet neutrality meant the death of thousands.

Another example of this deadly neutrality is shown in the play, *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt. Sir Thomas More is in prison for taking a stand in his belief that Henry VIII is wrong in deciding to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. Because he will not sacrifice his character to the wishes of the King, he is sent to prison. When his family comes to see him, the jailor ends their visit even though they beg him for more time. The jailor says, "You understand my position, sir, there's nothing I can do; I'm a plain, simple man and just want to keep out of trouble." Thomas More's response is a plea which deserves to echo through the world. "Oh, Sweet Jesus! These plain, simple men!"

These average, ordinary, everyday people. They say, "there's nothing I can do." But there is. They say, "I'm a plain, simple man." It's true. They say, "I just want to keep out of trouble." But they don't understand.

They don't understand that they have the ability to stop the inquisition, to release the prisoner, to educate the mind, to change the world. They are allowing the jailor of fear to hold them back in a complacent state of inaction.

Neutrality is the epidemic of our time. It not only quietly follows the decisions of a few purposive individuals, it is also soul destroying. As much as this neutrality helped to kill the heretics and infidels of the Spanish inqui-

sition, it allows leaders of today to go ahead with their agendas. These can be good. This does not mean that the people should revolt against their leaders. They do need to discard neutrality for understanding and take a stand. They should think for themselves and be willing to sacrifice if its worth it.

Helene Holt wrote in *Exiled*, "You must realize that neutrality isn't neutral at all. It always favors the despot, [it] adds to his power."

We are plain, simple men and women. But there is something we can do. It may be hard, but the strength is in our hands. Whether we support our leaders in their stance or find another way, we will be leading ourselves with understanding and courage. Rather than drifting in the current, abandon the river and walk on solid ground. Here it is our own choices and actions which determine our direction and make a difference. Cast neutrality aside, take a stand.

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