ECENT OFFERINGS IN THIS PUBLICATION have voiced burdens concerning the state of the church today. Such TOTT issues include: “The Five Solas of the Reformation (#60 & 61); “Target: Historical Evangelical Christianity” (#62); and “Why Study Church History?” (#64). I would dare do so once again.

In another past article (#56, “Band of Brothers”), we illustrated our theme using what has gradually become my favorite of Shakespeare’s plays, the historically accurate Henry V. While our previous article recounted Henry’s famous rousing speech at Agincourt (Act V, Scene 3), there is another scene earlier in the play that more than equals that drama.

In the Prologue to Act III, Henry sails from England with a large fleet of warships, lands in France, and lays siege to the port city of Harfleur on the northern coast (very near, in fact, to the shores where five centuries later the allies would land in Normandy). The cannons roar as the terrifying battle rages against the city walls. To make peace, the anxious King Charles offers Henry his daughter Katherine in marriage, along with a few insignificant dukedoms (small sub-regions within France) as part of her dowry. Henry rejects the offer out of hand and the siege continues, ultimately leading to a staggering victory. As the English army prepares to storm the city, Henry’s words ring out, part of which are as follows:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up with our English dead.

In peace there’s nothing so becomes a man As modest stillness and humility: But when the blast of war blows in our ears, Then imitate the action of the tiger; Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, Disguise fair nature with hard-favored rage.

. . . Let us swear
That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt not,
For there is none of you so mean and base
That hath not noble luster in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game’s afoot.
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry “God for Harry, England, and Saint George!”

While that’s pretty clear English even for our day, for those who still struggle with Elizabethan prose, here’s a modern “translation”:

Attack the breach in the city wall once more, dear friends, attack it once more—or else let’s close it up with English corpses. In peacetime, nothing looks better in a man than restraint and humility. But when the battle trumpet blows in our ears, then it’s time to act like the tiger. With muscles taut and blood stirred up, hide your civilized nature under the guise of [hard-featured] rage. . . . Prove you are worthy of your birth, which I do not doubt for a moment. For there isn’t one of you so low-born that your eyes don’t shine with noble luster. I see you’re standing like greyhounds on a leash, straining for the moment when you’ll be let loose. The hunt is on! Follow your spirit, and as you charge cry, “God for Harry, England, and Saint George!”

Now, while I am in no way trying to glorify war (or English history for that matter), this does vividly illustrate the war that Christians are, in fact, engaged in and how we should respond to that chilling reality.

Turning to our text, in these well-known verses about spiritual warfare, Paul first instructs us, Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the
wiles of the devil. The words stand against are stēnai pros, a military expression that means to stand in front of with a view to holding a critical position, to hold one’s ground. Further, able is đunamai (Eng. “dynamic”), which can be defined as “that which overcomes resistance.” By putting on God’s armor, we are able to defeat any resistance Satan offers and overcome any obstacle he puts in our path, whether it be moral, spiritual, or even doctrinal.

The idea here, then, is a primarily defensive tone, that we just face the enemy and hold our ground. This is further indicated by the fact that God has given us five pieces of defensive armor (vv. 14–17a) while providing only one offensive weapon, the sword (v. 17b).

There is something else here, however. It is extremely significant that Paul not only says that the armor makes us able to stand against Satan’s attacks (v. 11), but he adds in verse 13: *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand* (emphasis added). The Greek is actually different here. The root behind “stand” is histemi, while the word for withstand is anthistemi, which means “to set oneself against, oppose, resist.” This is the same word used in James 4:7, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” In light of the defensive word we saw earlier, this word is more offensive in tone. Not only must we be defensive, holding our present ground, but we must also be offensive, landing blows of our own on the enemy. Militarily speaking, no battle, no war, can be won by defense alone. God not only wants us to stand our ground, but He wants us to resist and oppose and land blows of our own with the Word of God.

How we need men today who will, indeed, cry, “Once more unto the breach,” and then lead the attack. Why? Because “the game’s afoot!” The parallels here, in fact, are striking. How many men today are willing to end up a corpse in the rubble in the fight for Christianity? We are not in peacetime, so we cannot afford stillness and restraint. The trumpet has sounded for war and we have to wage it with tenacity, for after all, we wield not just “a sword” but the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God! Taking prisoners, in fact, is not an option. While our nature remains civilized, and we certainly speak the Truth in love, this is still in the “the guise of [hard-featured] rage” against untruth. Further, how many men today truly “are worth [their] breeding,” fulfilling the demands God has set forth for leaders? How many are, indeed, “stand[ing] like greyhounds in the slips, straining upon the start”? And what should be our cry as we charge into the breach by the power of the Holy Spirit? Soli deo Gloria!

Let us contemplate history once again. Have there been men who have stood in that breach? Indeed there has. Here are just six that immediately come to mind.

**Charles Spurgeon (with Robert Shindler)**

I can think of no better illustration to begin with than what Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) faced in his day, namely, the Down-Grade Controversy. While we noted this in a previous article, it bears repeating and a little more detail.

The Controversy began in 1887 as a result of several articles that appeared in Spurgeon’s magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, which referred to the modernism that had crept into the Baptist Union. Spurgeon was deeply troubled by the Higher Criticism, the de-emphasis on preaching, the decline of the historic doctrines of salvation, the resultant diluting of the faith, and the general attitude of Pragmatism of the age.

In the March and April issues, Robert Shindler, a fellow Baptist pastor and close friend of Spurgeon, wrote two articles about these trends. In the first article, he cited how numerous liberal beliefs, such as Rationalism, Unitarianism, Socinianism, Arianism, and Arminianism, had replaced the pure Gospel preached and lived by the Puritans. He also cited the coldness and lifelessness of preaching even among Evangelicals, as well as their willingness to fellowship with those who were teaching false doctrine.

Even more important was Shindler’s second article. He continued his outline of the decline of Christianity, but even more critical was the **reason he offered that such a decline occurred**. He submitted that the Down-Grade was being caused by the same thing that caused similar declines throughout history. It was not due to doubting some particular doctrine or calling into question some principle of orthodoxy; rather, the **first step astray is a want of adequate faith in the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures.**

Shindler hit the proverbial nail on the head. Historically, the Word of God is always the first casualty in any war on Christianity. It must be this way, for once the authority of any system is destroyed, whether it be a religious system, political system, or any other system, then that system will crumble. In a very real sense, Christianity has never recovered from the Down-Grade. It resulted in attack after attack: Lower (Textual) Criticism, Higher (Historical) Criticism, Modernism, Neo-evangelicalism, Pragmatism, Relativism, Open Theism, and Post-modernism. Where are we headed next?

Spurgeon went further to lay the blame for this departure from the faith at the feet of the same ones who are to blame today, namely, preachers, men who, for whatever reason, refuse to preach the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. He wrote: “Too many ministers are toying with the deadly cobra of ‘another gospel,’ in the form of ‘modern thought.’” As a result, he was criticized and ostracized as one who was “unloving,” “narrow-minded,” and “divisive.” Words we often hear today about anyone who preaches doctrinal purity. In response to the criticism, Spurgeon gathered even more proof and wrote in the September issue, “A chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and the men who are prepared for an advance upon Scripture.” After many appeals to the Baptist Union for reform, and after careful thought and much prayer, Spurgeon withdrew.

Instead of that being the end of the matter, the Baptist Union sent a delegation of four doctors of divinity who met with Spurgeon on January 13, 1888 to ask him to rethink his withdrawal and to seek a way to maintain unity.
Spurgeon boldly replied that he would do so if an evangelical statement of faith were drawn up, unlike the existing statement that required a member to believe only in baptism by immersion. The Union flatly refused to do so, and five days later not only voted to accept Spurgeon’s withdrawal, but also voted on a resolution to condemn what he had done. The resolution passed by a vote of 2,000 to 7! Friends and even students in his Pastor’s College turned against him, once again illustrating that the majority is often wrong and that people will become our enemies simply because we tell them the truth (Gal. 4:16). 12

Neither Spurgeon nor Shindler hesitated for a moment to go “once more unto the breach.” Are we willing? How many pastors today agree with these words from Spurgeon?

I sometimes think if I were in heaven I should almost wish to visit my work at the Tabernacle, to see whether it will abide the test of time and prosper when I am gone. Will you keep in the truth? Will you hold to the grand old doctrines of the Gospel? Or will this church, like so many others, go astray from the simplicity of its faith, and set up gaudy services and false doctrines? Methinks I should turn over in my grave if such a thing could be. God forbid it! 13

**Athanasius**

Returning to the Arianism mentioned earlier, most Christians (and sadly many preachers) are totally unaware just how crucial the 4th-century was for Christianity. Arius, a parish priest in Alexandria, taught that Jesus was not coequal with God and was, in fact, a created being. Upon proclaiming his views concerning Christ’s Deity in 313, Arius’ teaching ignited controversy in Alexandria. By 318, the conflict had grown hostile and bitter. While Arius and his followers were condemned at a local church council in Alexandria in 321, the fight was far from over. False teaching is never so easily defeated. From Alexandria, their teaching spread all over Christendom. As well-known church historian Philip Schaff put it:

Bishop rose against bishop, and province against province. The controversy soon involved, through the importance of the subject and the zeal of the parties, the entire church, and transformed the whole Christian East into a theological battle-field. 14

The Roman Emperor Constantine badly wanted the conflict to end, probably more for the strength of the empire than for any spiritual reason. To that end, he called the famous church-wide Council of Nicaea in 325, where over 300 bishops convened to settle the controversy. Constantine read several letters from bishops about the issue and urged everyone to find a way to unify. Many were willing to compromise on the nature of Christ, but one man was not, a man whom God, in His eternal providence, strategically placed there for that very moment. That man’s name was **Athanasius** (293–373), a young 23-year-old theologian, also from Alexandria, who

fiercely debated Arius, a man 40 years his senior. It was, indeed, David taking on Goliath. In the end, Athanasius was triumphant, which lead to the most basic of all the creeds of the Church, the Nicean Creed, which reads in part:

> We believe in... one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who... came down from heaven... and was made man...

But again, the war had only begun. While only three men (Arius and two followers) refused to sign the creed, many others who did sign were still tolerant of Arians, not wanting to call anyone a “heretic.” Some even twisted the language of the Creed to say that Arianism really could fit into the wording. As a result, Athanasius was mercilessly persecuted. During his 46 years as bishop of Alexandria and his tireless and inflexible opposition to Arianism, he spent a total of 20 of those years on the run, being exiled five times, usually because Arians were in political control, and enduring false charges that ranged from witchcraft to murder. It was because of all that, in fact, that the phrase **Athanasius contra mundum** (against the world) arose. He stood virtually alone against almost overwhelming defection from orthodoxy. It is not an exaggeration to say that were it not for Athanasius, who has been dubbed “The Father of Orthodoxy,” we might all be Arians today.

Like Spurgeon, Athanasius also provides another challenge for us today. He refused to compromise the Truth for any reason or “be tolerant.” He rejected such ideas that we today have dubbed “Post-modernism,” the “Emerging Church,” “Post-evangelicals,” and other terms. He would have grieved over popular platitudes such as: “Christ unites us, but doctrine divides us.” Or, “It’s not propositions that matter but people that matter.” All such things are nothing but a smoke screen that hides error.

So, while the vast majority of Christians today have never heard of Athanasius, he is one of the great illustrations of the providence of God, the power of Truth, and the perseverance of courage. He was not afraid for a moment to go “once more unto the breach.” Are we?

**J. Gresham Machen**

Princeton Seminary (founded in 1812) was once a pillar of Christianity, where men such as Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and A. A. Hodge championed the historical faith. Another great warrior, who taught New Testament literature and exegesis for 15 years (1914–1929) was **J. Gresham Machen** (1881–1937).

Like a virus, however, Modernism crept into Princeton via German Rationalism. As we have noted before, even the celebrated B. B. Warfield (1851–1921), another Princeton giant, was infected. 15 Like Warfield, Machen went to Germany, spending a year studying the New Testament under German scholars. It was there that he was
exposed to the virus of destructive biblical criticism and was almost infected, especially through the strong influence of theologian Wilhelm Herrman.

Thankfully, however, Machen came out on the other side stronger for his struggle. So it was that when Princeton was reorganized in 1929 according to modernistic influences, Machen departed, along with three other powerful warriors—Oswald T. Allis, Robert Dick Wilson, and Cornelius Van Til—and founded Westminster Theological Seminary. Why? Because he felt compelled to fight the blatant unbelief that had crept into the Church, for Princeton Seminary was, in fact, the flagship of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). His two books—Christianity and Liberalism (1923) and What Is Faith? (1925)—were a devastating critique of Protestant Modernism.

What was the Church’s response? The same reaction that always results when the Truth is leveled against error. He was put “on trial” and ejected from the Church. Undaunted, however, he went on to become the principal figure in the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

What does Machen’s example say to us today? Plenty! One does not have to be a Presbyterian to recognize the threat of Modernism or its mutated descendent that plagues us today—Post-modernism. Because of the abject failure of the rationalistic approach of Modernism, Post-modernism throws all that off and dismisses the possibility of a sure and settled rationalistic approach of Modernism, Post-modernism throws all that off and dismisses the possibility of a sure and settled knowledge of Truth. It is a sad commentary on today’s Church when men who call themselves evangelicals not only tolerate but embrace the Relativism of our day. Machen fearlessly went “once more unto the breach.” Do any of us have such conviction to do likewise?

**John Huss**

Dying, ironically, in the same year that Henry V landed in France, John Huss (1369–1415) has rightly been called a “Pre-reformer.” The same is true of John Wycliffe (c. 1328–1384), “The Morning Star of the Reformation.”

What Wycliffe had been to England, Huss became to Bohemia (what we today call the Czech Republic). Educated at the University of Prague, he was ordained a priest in 1401 and occupied the most influential pulpit in the city, Bethlehem Chapel. While a loyal Roman Catholic, he had the same desire for doctrinal purity and church reform that Wycliffe had championed in England. He even translated Wycliffe’s famous work *Triadlogue* into Bohemian, which boldly declared that holy Scripture was the highest authority for every believer, the standard of faith and the foundation for reform in religious, political and social life. . . . In itself it was perfectly sufficient for salvation, without the addition of customs or traditions such as canon law, prayers to the saints, fastings, pilgrimages or the Mass.16

This electrified Bohemia, and the masses rallied around Huss. By 1410, Pope Alexander V issued a papal bull ordering the surrender and burning of all Wycliffe’s writings. Huss refused to relinquish his copies and was summarily excommunicated but continued writing and preaching in Bethlehem Chapel. With pressure steadily growing and the threat of a horrible death ever looming, he refused to be deterred.

In his two memorable books, *De Ecclesiâ (On the Church)* and *De Sex Erroribus (On the Six Errors)* he attacked transubstantiation, subservience to the pope, the popular belief in saints, the efficacy of the absolution by a priest, unconditional obedience to earthly rulers, and simony.17 In 1414, he was summoned to the Council of Constance with the solemn promise from King Wenceslaus, Emperor Sigismond, and the Pope of safe passage and kind treatment to and from the council. Within a month, however, he was arrested and cast into the dungeon in the Dominican convent—such are the promises of Satan and his minions. After months of “investigations,” the final trial came. Upon being confronted with his “heresies” and demands that he recant, Huss replied that he could do so only if he could be proven wrong from Scripture. As the flames burned around him he sang out, “Christ thou Son of the Living God, have mercy upon me.”

One more historical note is significant. In the Prague Library, there is a hymn to Huss’ memory, dating from 1572, with three medallions pictured. On the first medallion is a picture of Wycliffe striking sparks against a stone. On the second, Huss kindles a fire from the sparks. The third depicts Luther holding aloft a flaming torch. Are we not thankful for these three men who courageously went “once more unto the breach”? We are left to ask: as future generations look back on our era, will they see any such men?

**Thomas Cranmer**

While we could fill many more pages with examples,18 one more will have to suffice for now. We end, however, with a study in contrast, a man who was actually quite different from our other pictures. Were it not for such contrast, in fact, he would be little more than a footnote in history.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489–1556), while an English Reformer, was also a man of compromise. King Henry VIII wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon—since she had failed to give him a male heir—and marry Anne Boleyn, but the Pope would not give him permission to do so. In desperation, Henry broke with the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church and looked for someone who was willing to accept his claim that he had never been married to Catherine according to God’s Law. The man he found was Cranmer, whom he ultimately appointed Archbishop of Canterbury.

While Henry was never a true Protestant—he opposed Luther, for example, and continued to defend Catholicism—he was not without a merit or two. For one, he was instrumental in stripping the Church of the secular powers it had wielded for centuries. For another, William Tyndale’s dying prayer—“Lord open the eyes of the King of England”—was answered through Henry. To improve his image and lift his dignity, he was persuaded by Cranmer, as well as Thomas Cromwell, to publish *The Great Bible*, which in-turn was the result of the labors of Miles Coverdale, was 70-percent Tyndale’s genius,
and was the forerunner of both the Geneva Bible and the King James.

Sadly, in addition to the above compromise, Cranmer, also sanctioned Henry’s further marriages and divorces, as well as secretly taking a wife for himself and keeping her in seclusion until late in his life. There was the positive side, however. He greatly aided the Reformation in England. He welcomed other reformers from Europe, cooperated in removing images from churches, renounced the authority of the pope, replaced the Roman Catholic Missal (Service Book) with the English Book of Common Prayer, and introduced Coverdale’s Bible to the churches and encouraged its circulation, even writing the Preface, urging everyone to read, memorize, and live by Scripture. He also spoke out against masses for the dead, prayers to the saints, pilgrimages, and celibacy.

It was when Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary) ascended the throne in 1553, however, that compromise again overtook Cranmer. While Mary hated all Protestants—she burned nearly 300 at the stake, including children—she hated Cranmer in particular. She had never forgiven him for his part in annulling the marriage of her mother Catherine and Henry VIII, as well as his preference of Protestant Lady Jane Grey, a distant relative of the Royal line, for the throne instead of her. He was arrested and imprisoned in the tower in London. In the hope of leniency, Cranmer signed seven documents recanting most of his Protestant views and accepting the doctrines of Catholicism.

But, thankfully, one final reversal lay ahead. On the morning of Saturday, March 21, 1556, wood was piled in the middle of Broad Street in Oxford. Cranmer was brought forth and allowed to make a statement to the crowd, no doubt to further humiliate him. While no one doubted for an instant that he would use his last moments to recant his “heresies” and return to the “Holy Mother Church,” he stunned all present by announcing that in signing a recantation of his former beliefs, his hand had “offended in writing contrary to his heart.” He then continued, “Therefore, my hand shall first be punished, for if I may come to the fire it shall be first burned. And as for the Pope, I refuse him as Christ’s enemy, and Antichrist, and all his false doctrines.” He then actually ran to the stake. As the flames rose around him, he kept his vow. He thrust his right hand into the flames, leaving it there until it charred, and repeated the following words as long as he was able: “This unworthy right hand. This hand hath offended.”

So, while Thomas Cranmer faltered and compromised, in the end he did, indeed, go “once more unto the breach.” His martyrdom—along with Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer six months earlier—solidified the Reformation in England.

This prompts us again to ask, What of us today? How many evangelicals have signed documents in recent years that are nothing but compromises with Rome and other errors equally heinous? How many continue to falter, waver, and hesitate concerning the historic truths of the Faith? How many are “reevaluating” and “renegotiating” the very truths on which Christianity stands?

Well, like Cranmer, it is not too late for any of us to go “once more unto the breach.”

A Closing Request

I would close with a humble request: If you agree with the message presented in this article and are likewise burdened, I would deeply appreciate hearing from you. My reason is simple: that we might pray for one another (Job 42:10) and then encourage one another (1 Thes. 5:11; Heb. 3:13) to go “once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.” As David prayed: “He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me” (Ps. 55:18).

Dr. J. D. Watson
Pastor-Teacher

NOTES
1 Henry V, III. 1.1–8, 27–34
3 The three preceding paragraphs are from the author’s book, A Word for the Day: Key Words from the New Testament (AMG Publishers), 276.
4 See TOTT #64.
5 An attack on the authority of the Bible by denying its historical accuracy. See TOTT #62.
6 In contrast to Arminianism, recognizes man’s total depravity and helplessness in sin and God’s total sovereignty in salvation.
7 The belief that reason, apart from any outside authority, such as the Bible, is the only guide. See TOTT #62.
8 Holds that Jesus was merely human, human character can be perfected, the Bible has a natural not supernatural origin, and all souls will ultimately be saved.
9 Rejected the pre-existence of Christ, the propitiatory view of atonement, and puts a limitation on God’s omniscience.
10 Denies the full deity of Christ.
11 In contrast to Calvinism, elevates man’s “free will” over God’s sovereign choice in salvation. Teaches that God chose people for salvation based on His foreseeing that they would believe.
13 Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 23, 514.
14 History of the Christian Church, Vol. 3, Ch. IX, § 119.
15 See TOTT #13, “What’s Really At Stake in the Textual Issue?”
17 Simony is the act of paying for sacraments and consequently for holy offices or positions in the hierarchy of a church; named after Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–24).
18 We noted William Tyndale in TOTT #64 and Martin Luther in TOTT #60. We would also highly recommend the book, A Treasury of Evangelical Writings, compiled and edited by David Otis Fuller (Institute for Biblical Textual Studies).
19 It is common knowledge that Shakespeare used the Geneva Bible in his plays. In fact, there are numerous echoes from Isaiah in Henry V. It appears that he actually used “the text of the Geneva Isaiah and its [annotations] to create a medieval backdrop for his Renaissance drama.” See this interesting study, “Shakespeare’s Henry V & the Geneva Bible,” by John Knoeple, at: http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL6/knoeple.html.
20 Email: docwatson3228@gmail.com. USPS: POB 235; Meeker, CO; 81641. Dr. Watson is available to speak on these and other issues.
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What do other terms that appear in Scripture mean, such as: “fall away” (Heb. 6:4–6) “old man” (Rom. 6:6), and “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17)?

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