



Rev. John. S. Inskip (1816-1884)

“Wholly and Forever Thine:” The Life of Rev. John A. Inskip

John Inverso (2008)

Editor’s Note: John Inverso is a candidate for elder’s orders in the United Methodist Church and a student at Palmer Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. He is also a local pastor in the Greater New Jersey Conference, and wrote the following sketch for a course on Methodist History.

It is evident to me, and it must be to all, that God is present in this place, and the fact of His special presence is to us a clear indication of His approval of this meeting...There are bound up in the religious interests of this extraordinary Camp-meeting, [sic] influences which, we trust, shall extend over Christendom.¹

With these words the man who many considered “the general of the post-Civil War holiness crusade,”² Rev. John S. Inskip, opened the first national camp meeting for the pursuit of holiness. Unbeknownst to him, his desire to revive the church in its pursuit of holiness would see this message spread from that single campground in Vineland, New Jersey, across the country and around the globe. Before recalling his tireless efforts as the leader of the National Camp Meeting Association (NCMA), it would be beneficial to explore those watershed periods in which God molded John to accomplish all that he did.

¹A. Mclean and J. W. Eaton, *Penue; or Face to Face with God* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr. Publishers, 1869), 15, 17.

²Melvin Dieter, *The 19th Century Holiness Movement* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 229.

CONVERSION AND EARLY MINISTRY

Inskip was born in 1816 to a mother who was religious, but a father who showed little regard for anything of God. His family had moved from England to Wilmington, Delaware when John was five years old. It was there that one of John's older sisters came to faith in Christ. His father threatened that if she did not renounce her faith, he would throw her out of the house. She stood her ground and Mr. Inskip relented. However, when John expressed an interest in attending church, his father vehemently forbade him.

By age fourteen, John and his family were living in Chester County, Pennsylvania. His sister's conversion and that of a co-worker had affected him deeply. Curious about their religion, John attended a service at a Methodist church in Marshallton, Pennsylvania. John heard a message by Rev. Levi Scott which convinced John of his need for Christ. When an invitation was given to repent and receive Christ, John ran to the altar and was converted. One of the members there asked him to share his story and he gladly told of how Christ had pardoned him and comforted his soul.

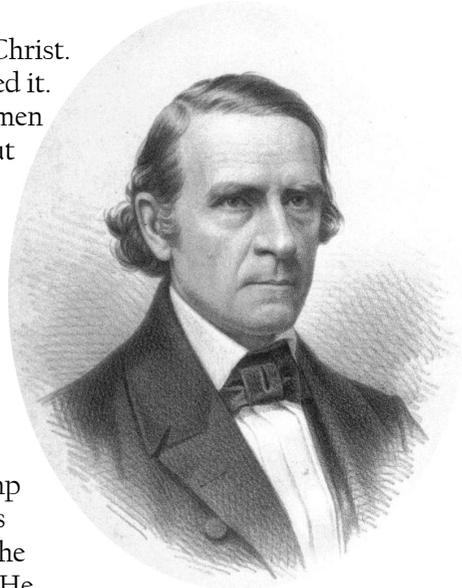
He joined the church that night knowing full well that his father would not approve. He even went as far as to arrange for a place to stay with one of the members, believing that his father would throw him out of the house. When he made his decision known to his parents – four days later – his mother, who was no supporter of Methodists, felt he was too young and his zeal would fade. His father, much to John's surprise, said nothing. They did not speak of it for several months.

Along with the relief he felt for not being disowned, John was consumed with a desire to evangelize. "I soon began...to feel that it was my duty to exhort sinners to flee from the wrath to come, which I did, now and then, and with some success."³

One such memorable instance occurred at a saddler's shop near his home. The fourteen year-old Inskip was having lunch with a saddler whom he was trying to lead to Christ. During the meal, another man named Morgan Massey came to the door begging John for relief from the guilt and distress he was feeling. Apparently, John's reputation as God's man had preceded him. John invited him in, told the saddler's wife and daughter – both believers – that they were going to pray for Morgan and

³William McDonald and John Searles, *The Life of Rev. John S. Inskip, President of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness* (Chicago: Christian Witness Co., 1885), 8.

the saddler until they received Christ. He then shut the door and locked it. No one was leaving until these men were saved. He made an altar out of the saddler's workbench and prayed and sang for hours. Finally, both men cried out to God and believed.⁴ This was no isolated incident but an early demonstration of the boldness and conviction that characterized John's ministry for the next 52 years.



Rev. Levi Scott, later elected a bishop, whose preaching converted John Inskip.

John went to his first camp meeting that year as well. It was attended by a rough crowd but he saw it as a valuable experience. He befriended two young men who had been converted there, and the three of them formed their own prayer meeting band. Their meetings were crowded and several people made confessions of faith. He was holding the meetings in his father's blacksmith shop with his father's consent. By spring of 1834, John was sixteen and his expanding Methodist Society had sparked a revival in the town. People from all stations in life were coming to hear them preach and be saved, including two of John's sisters. This proved to be the breaking point for his father. He petitioned the town to have the Methodist Society removed from the town and he kicked John out of the house. His mother offered no help, believing that by becoming Methodists, her daughters were ruining their lives.

John saw this as his chance to suffer for Christ and he rejoiced in it. The next day, he returned to pick up his things when his father's demeanor changed drastically. The Lord must have been working in his heart throughout the night because he told John he wanted them to have family prayers that night. These family devotions continued for several days until John's father repented and prayed to receive Christ. As a result, John was able to continue using the blacksmith shop, even

⁴McDonald and Searles, 9-10.

expanding it into a proper meeting house that could hold the 60 members of his Methodist Society.

MARRIAGE AND PASTORATE

It would be inaccurate to talk about John's ministry without mentioning his wife, Martha. She was his dearest love and his faithful companion for 48 years. They were married in November 1836 and shared their ministry long before such practices were common. It was well known to their parishioners and colleagues that Martha was almost as influential as God in John's effectiveness as a pastor and an evangelist. Her support and counsel was what he sought most and she gladly provided it. During times of trial and controversy, particularly when they could not be together, she would send him encouraging letters reassuring him of God's anointing upon him and adjuring him to exemplify Christ in all things. His biographers, who had served with John and Martha in the NCMA, noted of the Inskips' relationship that "never were two hearts more closely united, and never did two labor more harmoniously in the cause of God. He was ever unhappy in her absence, and ever fully satisfied and contented when she was present."⁵

John's effectiveness as a preacher did not stop at the blacksmith shop. Feeling called to the pastorate, John became a licensed exhorter in 1835 and was ordained an elder in the Philadelphia conference in 1840. Throughout his 35 years of pastoral ministry, John served dozens of churches in the Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dayton, New York East, Ohio, Philadelphia, and Troy Conferences.

His preaching was characterized by that same fiery zeal that he had when he was first saved. Throughout his entire ministry, even in failing health, the excitement and power with which he preached was staggering. He never failed to draw a crowd either in his churches or at camp meetings. On rare occasion was he not effective in leading people to experiencing salvation or entire sanctification.

John was also an opinionated and innovative pastor which, combined with his single-minded boldness, led him to conflicts with the press and with his own annual conference. His stance against the Mexican-American War led to clashes with the secular press as one

⁵McDonald and Searles, 21. For an account of Martha Inskip's see Kenneth O. Brown, "The World Wide Evangelist" - the Life and Work of Martha Inskip" in *Methodist History* 21 (July 1983), 179-191.

Dayton newspaper claimed John had condemned the slain on the battlefield to hell and other scandalous remarks. When another newspaper published the full text of his sermon and defended him, the scandal subsided. However, his censure by the Cincinnati Conference in 1851 took more than a reprint to rectify. John had led a rebuilding campaign in his Dayton, Ohio church which incorporated the controversial “family sitting” arrangement. Many in the conference disapproved of men and women sitting together and levied charges against him. He stood firm on his convictions and was officially censured. As further punishment, he was also reappointed to a failing church that could not afford to pay him enough to live. He accepted the censure but won an appeal at the next year’s General Conference.

Despite this and other controversies, Inskip excelled as a pastor. John was described as someone of “great judgment and wisdom, tender in sympathy, sweet in spirit, yet possessing the firmness of a rock – a man of sublime equipoise and balance of mind.”⁶ However, his outward success hid the bouts of depression that plagued him. His journals are replete with his struggles against self-condemnation and inadequacy. Often times these would strike after he had preached or when he did not get as good a response from the congregation as he had hoped. His worst struggles occurred when he was away from his wife. He wrote on one particular occasion “feel melancholy in consequence of my wife’s absence, I cannot tell why it is so, but it really seems to me I cannot be happy unless I have her society. How miserable I would be if she were taken from me.”⁷

God’s hand was on John through all of this for rising up in John was an ever-expanding desire to pursue a “deep piety,”⁸ seeing it as a necessary qualification for ministry. In his depression he realized how far from holy he was and in his successes he knew that God was grooming him for so much more. Appropriately, it would be through Martha that God would call John to experience entire sanctification.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Perhaps the most significant event in John’s life was his experience of entire sanctification. It had always been a thorn in John’s

⁶McDonald and Searles, 130.

⁷Ibid., 46.

⁸Ibid., 65.

side. He long felt the desire to achieve it but was highly critical of those who had so professed entire sanctification. Still, he defended it as a valuable doctrine of the Methodist church. In his book *Methodism Explained and Defended* he devoted a chapter to explaining the doctrine as well as the abuses of those who professed to have achieved it. He levied all sorts of charges against them calling them “wild and deluded enthusiasts,” “prideful,” “petulant,” and stumbling blocks for the church.

Upon reflecting, he admitted that he had experienced episodes of entire sanctification – once in 1835 and again in 1853 – but failed to make it known. After 1853, his journals evince a steady growth in his spiritual life although his prejudice against entire sanctification was as strong as ever. This period of growth, he believed, was a foretaste of the divine blessing God was preparing for him. He wrote “during my time at Birmingham...I was living closer to Christ than I had done for many years. It has sometimes occurred to me that during this period I might have been in a certain sense, ‘preparing the way of the Lord.’ If this, however, were the case, I was not conscious of it. Upon the subject of entire sanctification my prejudices were as strong as ever.”⁹

In August 1864, Martha and he went to the Sing-Sing Camp Meeting. She had been praying to have a deeper experience with God. On the 19th, she felt she had achieved a state of perfect love. When he heard about it, John was mortified.

However, the witness of his wife and the pressure of the Holy Spirit weighed upon John’s heart. During a sermon on Hebrews 12:1, as he was adjuring the congregation to declare that moment to be “wholly and forever the Lord’s” he heard a voice in his head tell him to “do it yourself and do it now.” Convicted, he called the church to follow him to the altar as he committed himself wholly to the Lord. It was this night that Inskip believed that he had received entire sanctification. He wrote of his newfound peace “I have been happy and joyous before, but never so peaceful. The sensation of triumph and exultation I have often felt, but I never knew so well the ‘rest of faith.’ I love God’s cause more and more. My whole heart is in this work.”¹⁰

Still, it took some time before he felt comfortable to speak of his experience in specific terms with others. He eventually gained the confidence to do so but the lingering prejudices that were his for so long needed time to work their way out of his system.

⁹McDonald and Searles, 79.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 79, 81.

Once he had begun speaking of it boldly, many of his colleagues warned him about being too rash in his claims and promises. They figured it to be “a religious spasm” that would not last long. Eight years worth of meticulously detailed journal entries proved them wrong. They are replete with his experiences and growth. Atop each John wrote his consuming thought “I am, oh Lord, wholly and forever Thine.”¹¹

The revival of his soul spread through his church as well. People were converted in record numbers, many professing their receipt of perfect love. His interest in promoting holiness in the church bore much fruit with people coming to faith in Christ and experiencing perfect love on a nightly basis. But John was not satisfied to remain in the local church and community. He longed to be more useful to God. The Lord would provide him with the proper outlet through which John could spread the revival of holiness across the country and around the world.

THE HOLINESS REVIVAL

The impact of the Civil War on the spirituality of the country cannot be measured. It affected every corner of American life, and demoralized the churches. Pietistic preaching had waned and opportunism was on the rise. Camp meetings had fallen off so greatly that at the 1864 General Conference, many argued in favor of discontinuing them. Worse, there was a growing opposition to the doctrine of entire sanctification as well. Many supporters of the Holiness Movement felt that there needed to be a renewed emphasis on holiness at these camp meetings. One such man was Rev. William Osborn.

Osborn approached John with the idea that a camp meeting devoted to promoting entire sanctification should be held. After a night of prayer the two men arose convinced that it was meant to be. They held a larger meeting on June 13, 1867 in Philadelphia with thirteen other Methodist leaders who they knew would support the idea. They decided to hold the meeting on July 17-26, 1867 in Vineland, New Jersey and called themselves the National Camp-meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.

When the Vineland meeting was held, the organizers tried to keep an account of the number of people converted but they soon found it impossible. Every sermon ended with throngs of people clamoring

¹¹McDonald and Searles, 84.

towards the altar in repentance. It was deemed a remarkable success. Upon the completion of the event, Inskip was elected president of the NCMA and served in that position until his death.

The NCMA became one of the most influential bodies for promoting holiness that the church had ever seen. John was conscious of the impact it was having. In March of 1871, John requested and his annual conference approved him for full-time evangelism. Thus began a twelve-year career that took him and the NCMA across the United States and around the world. Churches across the land invited them to hold their revivals. As they traveled, they would hold more revivals along the way.

John's preaching, prayers, and passion were legendary. During the Pacific Campaign of 1871, Inskip held holiness camp meetings in Maryland, California, Utah, Missouri, and Ohio. He could draw entire crowds to repentance, even the most unruly attendees who came only to mock and disturb the meetings were convicted of their sin and repented. His and his fellow evangelists' preaching was described as "direct and powerful, and brought on a crisis in the case of all who heard it. It seemed to sinners, and worldly Christians, that the Day of Judgment had come."¹²

After that first camp meeting season closed, Inskip continued to hold evangelistic services in Illinois until he became sick and spent two months recuperating at Ocean Grove, New Jersey. He then continued to hold services wherever he was invited, including churches in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. His biographers summed up John's year with this report: "During the year, Mr. Inskip...traveled more than twenty thousand miles, held about six hundred public services, heard more than seven hundred ministers and three thousand members profess that they had experienced the blessing of full salvation, to which was added the conversion of some twelve hundred souls."¹³ This would prove to be indicative of most every year of John's life as an evangelist.

By 1880, the efforts of the NCMA expanded around the globe. William Osborn had become a presiding elder of the Bombay District of the South India Conference and proposed to Inskip an "around-the-world" evangelistic tour. They would start in England and hold holiness camp meetings across Europe, India, Palestine, Alexandria, Madras,

¹²McDonald and Searles, 123.

¹³Ibid., 149.

The Inskip home, after it was later converted into a hotel, in Ocean Grove, New Jersey



Jerusalem, and Australia. After months of prayer and counsel, Inskip and the NCMA decided that this was, in fact, a call from God and they decided to undertake this enormous mission. Support came in from all corners of the globe. The North and South India Conferences offered their help in whatever capacity was needed. Believers in Rome offered their homes for the evangelists and their families. Bishops from several conferences in which Inskip had served sent letters of commendation and well-wishes to encourage John and his wife in their endeavor.

It was June, 1880, after an unceasing season of revivals and camp meetings, the Inskips and their fellow evangelists boarded a ship bound for England. July 8, 1880, they landed in Liverpool and began their global crusade. In October 1880, they concluded their tour of England and headed to India, arriving in Bombay in mid-November. In January, after holding many camp meetings across India, the party decided to split up, half of the team continuing on to Europe while Inskip and Osborn set off for Australia and then reaching home in June 1881. John's biographers wrote of their world tour "The circle of the globe had been made on one of the noblest missions which ever engaged the human soul—to spread Scriptural holiness. Their work speaks for itself, and fully justifies the

sacrifice made. Eternity will fully reveal the good accomplished.”¹⁴

Under John’s leadership and tireless efforts, the NCMA sparked a global movement that bore spiritual fruit on four continents. Countless thousands had been brought to conversion or had been led to experience perfect love through its efforts. While there were many preachers and laypersons who in their own right were powerfully used by God, none stood out more brightly than John Inskip.

John had been in failing health ever since his return from his world tour. On the day of his death, March 7, 1884, one of his biographers, John Searles, visited John in his Ocean Grove, New Jersey home. Upon seeing the half-conscious Inskip he wrote:

It seemed difficult to realize that we were looking upon the leader of the great holiness movement in the present history of the Church, who so recently appeared so strong, and full of almost youthful vigor,—whose constitution and makeup seemed to defy the effects, either of toil or increasing years. He often said to the writer: ‘I want to die in the work.’ His record is one of incessant activity and glorious success. After singing, ‘My latest sun is sinking fast,’ we joined in prayer, and felt that Heaven was bending low, and the angels, and especially the presence of Jesus, was there. We turned away from the dying hero of a thousand glorious victories for Christ, with inexpressible sadness, and yet with a secret joy that we should soon join him, with a host of the brothers of the Association, and other friends of holiness, in the blessed life above – a life unmeasured by the flight of years, where all is Heaven forever.

The last song sung, on the day of his departure, was, “The sweet by-and-by.” While singing that beautiful and appropriate hymn, the dying man pressed his loving wife to his breast, and then, taking her hands in his, raised them up together, and with a countenance beaming with celestial delight, shouted, “Victory! Triumph! Triumph!”¹⁵

¹⁴McDonald and Searles, 186.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 200.