

## The Most for the Most Unhappy Pastor and Philanthropist, Andrew Reed



On the day of his ordination, Andrew Reed must have known that he wouldn't have an easy ministry. His first pastorate was with the New Road Chapel in East London, and the church had fallen on hard times. The once-vibrant congregation had dwindled to only sixty members, housed in a heavily mortgaged building that could easily seat eight hundred people. The church was located on a busy and prosperous market street, but just a few blocks away were some of the worst slums in London. There, garbage and sewage was piled in great heaps and the foul drainage seeped into the walls and water supply of the homes. Disease was rampant and working conditions so brutal that the average life expectancy was only twenty-two years.<sup>1</sup> Nearly every family was one paycheck away from abject poverty.

After the ordination ceremony Reed wrote in his journal, "The solemnity of the occasion, together with an impression of my own insufficiency, almost overwhelmed me. . . . I am desirous, not merely of *beginning* well but of *running* well. *Setting out* is something, *holding out* is more. Jesus is sufficient for all things."<sup>2</sup> And with that affirmation, Reed set out to bring the Gospel to the slums—to give "the most for the most unhappy."<sup>3</sup>

Early in Reed's first year in ministry, he visited a dying man who had been raising his two children alone after the death of his wife. The man confided in Reed how concerned he was about what would happen to them when his own life ended. He knew it would be soon. And the man had good reason to be concerned. The plight of orphans in Victorian London was dismal. The few orphanages that existed were more concerned with profiting from child labor than with charity. Worse yet were the workhouses, or the fate of fatherless children left to their own devices on the streets.

Reed compassionately agreed to find a place for the children. He visited existing orphanages, searching diligently for proper accommodations. One typical institution required children as young as five years old to work eleven to thirteen hours a day in a weaver's shop.<sup>4</sup> Appalled, Reed placed the man's children in a private home at his own expense, and began to develop a plan to build an orphanage where children in similar circumstances would be loved and nurtured.

Reed enlisted the help of everyone he could find—his church, friends in the clergy, royal patrons including Prince Albert and the Duke of Wellington,

businessmen and the author Charles Dickens, who wrote about the plight of the London poor in his popular novels. Reed believed that asking for help for the truly needy might awaken compassion placed in everyone by common grace. He was sure that this kind of fundraising was a way of doing God's work, blessing both the giver and the poor. Within a few years, two institutions were built to house orphaned children. Later in his life, Reed would establish a third.

This pattern—being presented with a need in his congregation, being moved by compassion to meet that need and then providing help to others with the same affliction—would continue throughout Reed's ministry. When he saw that many children in his church couldn't read and were required to work on school days, he established evening schools to teach basic reading and math, and Sunday Schools for elementary religious instruction.

When a family in his congregation asked his help in finding a place for a child with severe learning disabilities, Reed founded an asylum where the learning disabled were loved and taught to work as their abilities allowed. And when he learned that thousands of desperately ill people were discharged from London hospitals each year to die alone and penniless, he established the first hospice. The care provided was so beneficial that several "incurable" cases went home cured. The rest were lovingly supported through their last days.

Reed was far ahead of his time in providing family-like structure in his institutions and in training the staff to consider the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of each person. Everyone who was able to understand was taught the gospel. Reed said, "I have always had their souls in view."

Despite the heavy demands of his philanthropic work, Reed did not neglect his duty to his congregation. He wrote, "May I remember that I am a minister of the New Testament! What is there equal to this? The pursuits of the philosopher, the patriot, the philanthropist, are nothing compared with the minister of Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup> Over the years, the New Road Church paid its mortgage, outgrew the eight-hundred-seat building and became the Wycliffe Chapel, with an attendance of over 2,000 people each Sunday for decades.

Andrew Reed died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 1862, after serving his congregation and the poor of London for 50 years. He ran well. He held out. He gave the most for the most unhappy. Jesus was sufficient for all things.

*Philanthropy is much to me, but theopathy more. The one offers a human motive, the other, a divine. We never rise to the highest, nor are our moralities safe, till we can say, "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things."*<sup>6</sup> —Andrew Reed

<sup>1</sup> Shaw, Ian, *The Greatest is Charity*, Evangelical Press, 2005, page 46-47 (for many facts in this paragraph)

<sup>2</sup> Reed, Andrew and Reed, Charles, *Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed, D.D.*, Strahan and Co., London, 1863 Page 45

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, page 481

<sup>4</sup> Shaw, pg. 60

<sup>5</sup> Reed, page 424

<sup>6</sup> Reed, Page 479