

THE ROLES OF CHURCH, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC
CHARITY

A Discussion on Poor Relief in Prague during the Late 18th Century

Yuki Haruyama

This article considers the roles of poor relief among the ecclesiastic, private and public sectors by focusing on a discussion about how best to support those in need between two aristocrats in Prague in the late eighteenth century. One of these men was Johann Marquard Freiherr Kotz von Dobrsch, who established the institutions of night watchmen and workhouses in Prague during the early 1780s, and the other was Johann Nepomuk Count Buquoy, who established a different system of poor relief with a newly founded Christian brotherhood in his estates in southern Bohemia at the end of 1779. Buquoy mobilized contributions from the church, private and public sectors to support only the poor living within his estates while excluding alien beggars. In 1782 he implemented his system of poor relief in Prague as well, thereby incurring Kotz's criticism.

Both reform approaches are discussed with reference to recent studies emphasizing the importance of church and private charity, especially the "mixed economy of welfare" in Britain. The results show that operating a "closed" relief system such as Kotz's workhouses was inadequate due to limitations in terms of operating costs and space. Besides, Buquoy criticized that the poor, who deserved to be supported at home, were being put into the workhouses together with other inmates as if they were prisoners. By contrast, Buquoy encouraged the investigation and classification of causes and grades of poverty for the purpose of providing appropriate assistance. He also placed emphasis on "open" relief for the poor by way of charitable activities organized by his brotherhood under the guidance of priests. Eventually, Buquoy's method emerged as a suitable measure that could coexist with other institutions for disabled or ill people.