

The duty of charity in the Portuguese *Misericórdias* of the 1700s

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Summary:

The Christian precept of charity has always been understood to be an instrument that leads to salvation. For this reason, it became a duty for all Christians and not only for the rich. Although the wealthy were better placed to practice charity, Biblical examples point to the need for the common man (neither rich nor poor) to exercise it as well.

The anxiety that modern men felt about reaching Heaven is what made them benefactors, spurring them to set aside a part of their fortunes, if not all of it, in the form of alms and given to the poor, for the dowries of orphaned girls, the treatment of the sick, the securing of freedom for prisoners and captives, and for the proper burial of the destitute so that they could enjoy eternal rest.

Our study aims at analyzing the way in which Portuguese Almshouses (*Misericórdias*) in the 1700s operationalized charity, highlighting not only the policies that were followed but also the groups that benefited.

During the Modern Period, Catholic Church doctrine vigorously recommended charity as a way to obtain Heaven. It accepted poverty in discursive terms and defended the relinquishing of worldly possessions, thus turning alms and alms-giving into one of the most valued means of distribution.

As an intermediary between the rich and the poor, alms-giving was to be practiced by the former and directed to the less fortunate, contributing to the lessening of their state of poverty, and at the same time, all those who practiced charity were to demonstrate the virtue of forsaking material things, showing humility and love toward the defenceless poor. Alms were considered to be a mandatory precept of the Catholic Church, becoming a duty for the rich and a right for the poor.

Whether in the Bible or whether in the words of churchmen, there was no end to the recommendations in favour of alms-giving and to the demonstration of its benefits. In the 18th century, *Frei António Cartaxo* asserted that God made “rich men for the good of the poor and made poor men for the benefit of the rich, and in such providence the rich should give aid to the poor and through the same providence they are want to beg the aid

of the rich since [...] for to them it is fitting that they should pray, to the rich that they should give and to God that he should give recompense.”¹

Considering the existence of the reciprocal relationship between the rich and poor with respect to the role that each one had for the other, this religious writer went on to add the functions assigned to each one: attributing to the poor the task of praying for their patrons, to the rich was the task of donating their money and to God was the role of rewarding them for their actions. Charity created expectations of reciprocity. The interaction of the first two would blend in the infinite mercy of a generous God, as the scriptures and the religious literature of the era would have us believe. However, the rationalization of charity imposed new rules, granting to the *Misericórdias* the ability to collect funds for distribution.

Moral treatises, the sermons almost always delivered on days of the greatest religious significance and importance, catechism content and many other actions of the Catholic Church demonstrated the extent to which the duty of charity should be present for the faithful. Helping the unfortunate became a theme for analysis and a means for salvation.

The vision of theologians did not veer far from that of the moralists. They also manifested little trust in wealth and condemned idleness, considering it a source of vice and a detour off the righteous path².

In Portugal, institutional charity is closely linked to the *Misericórdias*. These institutions were dedicated to the practice of the 14 works of charity and constituted the principal brotherhoods and charitable institutions in Portugal during the Modern Period.

The *Misericórdias*, brotherhoods of laymen, were founded in 1498 with the creation of the *Santa Casa de Lisboa*, and they spread rapidly throughout Portugal and the Portuguese empire, showing strong membership amongst the local populations. These were brotherhoods created under royal authorization in which the local elite classes took charge. These institutions attained the status of “immediate protection under the Sovereign” under the Council of Trent (1545-1563). They functioned as *numerus clausus*

¹ Antonio de S. Francisco de Paula Cartaxo, *Discursos Moraes e Evangelicos sobre vicios, e virtudes*, vol. 1, Lisboa, Officina Patro de Francisco Luz Ameno, 1783, pp. 222-223.

and were composed of men. In addition to the *Santa Casas*, other agents could also dispense charity: bishops, cathedral chapters (*cabidos*), private individuals and manor households.

Advancements in Portuguese historiography today allow us to better know the role played by the *Misericórdias* in the society of the *Antigo Regime*. The same cannot be said of the actions of private individuals and the Catholic Church in this area. Lacking are studies that might permit a more sustained and complete analysis on their social interventions.

The *Misericórdias* emerged at a time of deep spiritual renewal when the system of assistance was being reformed. In Portugal, as in the rest of Europe, several brotherhoods and hospitals were founded, thus making for larger and better-equipped institutions to respond to the growing numbers of the poor.

The Modern Period witnessed an increase in the number of the poor and saw them moving to urban areas in search of more promising alms-giving. It was also in the cities where the principal aid-giving institutions were located, where the moneyed middle classes lived and where the majority of convents and some manor houses were located, thus promising even greater receipts of gifts.

In addition to the inability to sustain all the needy who arrived, the urban centres also feared the transmission of disease. These groups embodied fear and danger and were looked down upon as being undesirable; the resulting feelings caused them to be shunned. Above all, it was the vagabonds, homeless and unsettled who wandered about the land who most disturbed the population. These poor were not authorized to beg. Only those who were considered unable to earn a living could solicit alms. The rest were deemed fit for work and had to occupy themselves with suitable activities.

Hiding behind reasons based on sanitary concerns, the legislation would expel these undesirables for being either carriers of contagious diseases, such as leprosy or “bouba sores” on the skin (syphilis), or simply for being vagrants. This notion finds its roots in the Middle Ages and aims at linking the poor to the concept of work. Manual labour was

² Diogo Guerreiro Camacho de Aboim, *Escola moral, politica, christã e juridica. Divindade em quatro palestras nas quaes lem de prima as quatro virtudes cardeaes*, Lisboa, Domingos Gonçalves, 1747, pp. 141-144.

considered to be a “sure means to change your luck to good,”³ and it was recommended to everyone as a way to combat idleness.

Despite these prohibitions, reducing the flow of the poor proved to be a losing battle, moreso given that Heaven could be gained with alms-giving, making their presence useful for the rich.

The ideologues of the 18th century renewed the proposals for the world of poverty and underscored the need for the poor to dedicate themselves to work. With the Enlightenment, the causes of poverty were evaluated and found related to “socio-economic organization.”⁴

The poor were considered unproductive and constituted a social weight placed upon all citizens. By not being gainfully employed in work, they were seen as useless and criticized for leading a dishonest life. Seen as people who rarely or never followed norms of morality, beggars were identified as having illicit relationships, producing illegitimate children and abandoning them to live off of charity.⁵

Idleness was considered a sin. Consequently, the poor person who voluntarily became a wandering vagrant lost his right to charity.⁶ But more than this, he was pursued or shunned, and in Europe he was locked in an aid institution and forced to work under the repressive orders of internment.⁷

As for the number of beggars in the Lima River region, North of Portugal, Lima Bezerra toward the end of the 18th century made note of the “many half-naked boys begging for alms” and evaluated some causes of poverty. A defender of agricultural modernization, development of industry and jobs for poor labourers in these activities, the author comes out against alms-giving to vagrants and the idle since he considered that they should be useful to society. He was knowledgeable of Europe in his time, not just

³ Manuel Vilas-Boas do Cenáculo, *Instrução pastoral do [...] Bispo de Beja sobre os Estudos Fysicos do seu clero*, Lisboa, Regina Officina Typografica, 1786, p. 29.

⁴ Maria Antónia Lopes, *Pobreza, Assistência e Controlo Social. Coimbra (1750-1850)*, vol. 1, Viseu, Palimage Editores, 2000, p. 31.

⁵ Robert Molis, “De la mendicité en Languedoc (1775-1783)”, in *Revue d’Histoire Economique et Sociale*, 52, n°1, 1974, p. 483.

⁶ Bernard Schnapper, “La répression du vagabondage et sa signification historique du XIVE au XVIIIe siècle”, in *Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger*, vol. 63, 1985, p. 144.

⁷ José Cubero, *Histoire du vagabondage, du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris, Éditions Imago, 1998, pp. 98-125; Mario Rosa, “Chiesa, idee sui poteri e assistenza in Italia dal cinque al settecento”, in *Società e Storia*, n° 10, 1980, pp. 800-801.

from his own travels but also from the correspondence he maintained with economic societies and scientific academies. The author presented proposals as part of an illustrated programme whose objective was to improve the welfare of the people. One of his goals was to resolve the problem of poverty. Following the Spanish model, Lima Bezerra proposed aid for the legitimate poor and excluded from receiving alms those considered to be the false poor.⁸ This position was taken in accordance with the way that begging was viewed – considered an economic, social and moral violation, meaning it should be dealt with as such.⁹

Like many other authors, he criticized the existence of so many feast days, considering that they took the population away from work and contributed to vagrancy. The same was said of religious holy days and the number of religious brotherhoods. Some diocese chose to reduce the number of holy days.¹⁰

Moral concerns were also part of this sentiment of revulsion aimed at the poor. Beggars were less likely to follow the rules of morality because they were less tied down and controlled by society; they were accused of socially reprehensible behaviour and frequently associated with vice.

The growing world of poverty, the pressure which the poor placed on the resources of charity and the corresponding visibility acquired by this group in the Modern Period opened up a gap between those people considered deserving and the remaining others. Over the latter a climate of suspicion prevailed. In order to benefit from alms, one needed to be selected through a series of criteria that focused on merit. Formulas were imposed to distinguish the real from the false poor, the good beggar from the bad, for the sake of giving alms only to those found deserving.¹¹ It was merit that dictated one's inclusion or exclusion from the list of recipients.

Although they lived in an ambiguous situation, the poor served the rich on two essential planes: for the salvation of the soul and for the exercise of power. Due to this

⁸ Manuel Gomes de Lima Bezerra, *Os estrangeiros no Lima*, vol. II, Viana do Castelo, Câmara Municipal de Viana do Castelo; Câmara Municipal de Ponte de Lima; Centro de Estudos Regionais e Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 1992 [1791], pp. 17, 51-53

⁹ Jacques Soubeyroux, "El discurso de la Ilustración sobre la pobreza", in *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispanica*, tomo XXXII, nº 11, 1984, p. 128.

¹⁰ Jorge Crespo, *A História do Corpo*, Lisboa, Difel, 1990, pp. 359-364.

¹¹ On this theme is Alain Brossat, "Méfiez-vous des mendiants", in Odile Gaudon (dir.), *La charité. L'amour au risque de sa perversion*, Paris, Éditions Autrement-Série Morales nº 11, 1993, pp. 104-105.

dually important role, the elite classes maintained a relationship of apparent complicity with them, giving the poor alms whenever they met in the street or knocked at their doors and aiding them through institutions of charity.

For their part, the poor would wait for their requests to be heard and for the game of charity to be played out. When this failed to happen and the alms not forthcoming, the beggars would insult, mistreat and curse their neglectful benefactors.

The poor would beg in the streets, at the doors of monasteries, chapels and churches, quite frequently accompanied by small children, using them as bait to more easily garner their alms.

Frei Luís da Apresentação in the 17th century added another motive, explaining that the “reason the poor are at the door of the Church is so that no one will enter without giving any alms and be empty-handed before God. He who seeks mercy from God must first use it with his fellow man.”¹² This churchman was showing the need that the wealthy had to show God their compassion toward their neighbours before requesting the divine grace they were hoping to obtain.

Being present at the act of charity also fulfilled certain goals for the benefactor. It earned him prestige and admiration for the display of compassion toward one’s fellow man. Alms given out at the door of a convent or church assumed ostentatious forms and were an affirmation of power and social prestige.¹³ Beyond having this effect, the elite classes took care to guarantee this affirmation through the gifts and the repetition of gestures of submission and thanksgiving, which generated socially very revered behaviours. Seen thus, the poor person was a mere instrument in the hands of the wealthy, contributing to the justification of his power.

The assistance given to the poor at Portuguese *Misericórdias* took place within the previously-mentioned parameters, fulfilling the duty to Christian charity.

¹² Luis da Apresentação, *Livro das Excelências da Misericórdia e frutos da Esmola*, Lisboa, Giraldo da Vinha, 1625, p. 10.

¹³ Bronislaw Geremek, *A Piedade e a Força. História da Miséria e da Caridade na Europa*, Lisboa, Terramar, 1995, p. 35.

The practice of charity was imposed, and not only upon the *Misericórdias* but upon everyone: other brotherhoods, religious orders, bishops, cathedral chapters (*cabidos*) and private individuals were expected to practice charity as well.¹⁴

The exercise of charity in the *Misericórdias* was related not only to the financial capabilities of each one of these institutions but also to the management options it selected. These brotherhoods grew and thrived through the receipt of property bequeathed to them and through the lending of money with interest. Other income was received as well: alms, from the selling of products, from burial fees, etc.

The 17th century constituted a period of affirmation for these brotherhoods. In the 18th century, they turned into Baroque institutions where grandeur manifested itself at the same time as signs of crisis: fewer items received in inheritance, delays in payments of rents, grants and interest due to them, electoral frauds and the reduced capacity to attract new members to the brotherhood. However, they continued to be powerful, building new aid projects with a vitality that has kept them active up to the present day.

In the 1700s, these institutions gave continuity to the practices of charity already underway, and in some cases, they assumed new responsibilities with the building of facilities for women.¹⁵

The concern for the honour of women justified the attention paid to it by the *Santas Casas*. Considered weak and unable to face the challenges of society by themselves, most particularly in the area of moral comportment, women became the primary target of these institutions, at the same time that society reserved an exclusive form of charity only for them: dowries for marriage.

Thus from the beginning, the *Misericórdias* dedicated their activities to freeing captives and visiting those in jail, treating the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the poor, giving drink to the thirsty, giving lodgings to pilgrims and burying the dead.

¹⁴ Miguel Luis López- Guadalupe Muñoz, “Sanidad doméstica, solidaridad corporativa: las confradías ante la enfermedad en la España Moderna” in Laurinda Abreu (ed.), *Asistencia y Caridad como Estrategias de Intervención Social: Iglesia, Estado y Comunidad (s. XV-XX)*, Bilbao, Universidad del País Vasco, 2007, pp. 74-75.

¹⁵ Luciana Mendes Gandelman, *Mulheres para um império: órfãs e caridade nos recolhimentos femininos da Santa Casa da Misericórdia (Salvador, Rio de Janeiro e Porto – século XVIII)*, Campinas, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2005, doctoral dissertation.

Freeing captives and visiting those in jail constituted the first work of charity and was also the first task undertaken by the brotherhoods because the imprisoned were considered a priority.

After its inception, the *Santa Casa de Lisboa* received a set of privileges from the crown with regard to the imprisoned. The actions of King D. Manuel I (1495-1521) endeavoured to strengthen the recently-created institution, and he accorded it the conditions to deal with the incarcerated.

Thus, through various acts of law, the *Misericórdias* were authorized to go into the jails to clean them and to have contact with the imprisoned and the cases they were involved in, to investigate their level of poverty with the jailor in order to determine the scope of aid from the brotherhood. Unlike what was seen in other European countries where various institutions could take care of prisoners, as in Spain, for example, in Portugal only the *Misericórdias* had this privilege.

After the level of poverty of the prisoners had been proven, the brotherhood took them under its protection and took charge of the respective judicial processes at the same time it fed, clothed, aided them in their illnesses and buried the dead.

The privileges received from the Crown made it such that the brotherhood members had preference at royal audiences and that the condemned to be deported could be more quickly dispatched to the ships.¹⁶

While a judicial case waited for a superior court, it was common for these brotherhoods to request support from its counterpart in said locality to accompany the case.

In case of illness, the prisoners were visited by doctors and/or surgeons from the brotherhood and if the clinical report were serious, they could be placed in the member hospitals.

The imprisoned were also aided spiritually through the celebration of mass in chapels or churches in front of the prisons, where the Chaplain of the *Misericórdia* celebrated holy mass with the detained able to attend even though behind bars.

¹⁶ Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, “Justiça e Misericórdia(s). Devoção, caridade e constituição do Estado ao Tempo de D. Manuel I”, in *Penélope*, nº 29, 2003, p. 29.

When persons died in the jail, they were put into shrouds, buried and then a mass was said for the repose of their souls.

On All Saints' Day (November 1) there took place at the *Misericórdia* a procession to the gallows in which all members had to be present. They were bound by statute to comply. They would go out to retrieve and bury the remains of those who suffered the pain of justice. This was an act of great symbolism that would promote the notion of aiding those who were utterly disadvantaged and exposed to public judgment.

Still within the scope of aid to prisoners, these brotherhoods would help captives through donations. In Portugal, it fell to the *Ordem da Santíssima Trindade* to aid and rescue the prisoners of faith, but in the 18th century the *Santa Casas* gave alms not only to the religious that requested money for this cause but also answered favourably to the appeals of monarchs who became involved in these dealings. They also aided individuals who had captive relatives in Moorish lands who were trying to secure their release.

The involvement of *Misericórdias* in the treatment of diseases was dominant and manifested itself in two ways: those who sought care in hospitals and those who were helped in their own homes. This dual focus was formally declared in 1618 and established a means for updating the policy.

The overwhelming majority of Portuguese hospitals in the Modern Period were under the administration of the *Misericórdias* and thus incorporated¹⁷ into the brotherhoods' facilities or included in new structures built from the ground up.

These institutions for the poor could also receive persons "of quality," for example, members of religious orders; however, they would have to pay for their treatment while the poor were attended to without charge.

The hospital furnished transportation for the sick, clean laundry, food, health care and spiritual assistance. It had a clinical staff comprised of doctors, surgeons, blood-letters and nurses.

¹⁷ During the second half of the 16th century and the 17th century, the Almshouses (*Misericórdias*) requested and received authorization from the King to incorporate several existing aid institutions. These were badly administered, frequently by men of the local municipal government or by the District Official (*Provedor da Comarca*), or in the case of the Leprosy Hospitals (*gafarias*) with very few or no sick patients at all. This activity enabled treatment facilities of larger dimensions to emerge, but did not do away with smaller hospitals.

Before being admitted, the sick were required to go to confession and once in hospital had to attend religious services in the infirmaries where the Chaplain celebrated mass at an altar. The sick would also receive the sacraments of communion and extreme unction. In the case of someone's death, the body would be taken away, kept in an appropriate place and later buried by the institution.

At a time when caring for the soul took precedence over that of the body, the hospital underscored these values in the services rendered to its patients.

Portuguese hospitals of the 1700s were permanently overcrowded, and it was hardly a rare sight to find more than one patient per bed. Explaining this situation is also the fact that the majority of these hospitals were small facilities with indeed very few beds.

Although demand was high, there were those who preferred to be treated at home instead of in public, at the hospital. Many women stated their desire to be treated at home. In these cases, the *Santa Casa* would send its health professionals and would help with monetary alms-giving, foodstuffs, clothing and remedies. In addition to women, the poor who felt particularly ashamed¹⁸ would request aid to be given at home.

Since military hospitals began in Portugal only in the 19th century, up to then the military sick were treated in field hospitals that were set up and taken down when deemed necessary, and in the *Misericórdia* hospitals, with due authorization from the Crown. The good relationship that existed between the Royal Family and the *Misericórdias* facilitated the signing of accords that would open the doors of the hospitals operated by these brotherhoods to the Army.¹⁹ This situation was felt more keenly in border areas when during times of war the *Misericórdia* Hospitals would be full of soldiers.

In perusing the Archives of these brotherhoods, much information can be found regarding the costs of buying fabric and making garments to clothe the naked. Analysis

¹⁸ These were persons who had belonged to a well-to-do class and lost their fortunes, feeling shame for the situation of poverty into which they had fallen.

¹⁹ About the contract signed between the Almshouse (*Misericórdia*) of Vila Viçosa and the Crown, consult Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo, *Dar aos pobres e emprestar a Deus: as Misericórdias de Vila Viçosa e Ponte de Lima*, Barcelos, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Vila Viçosa; Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Ponte de Lima, 2000, pp. 189-193.

of these records allows us to know who received this charity, the quality of the clothing handed out and even the calendar for distribution.

The quantity and quality of the clothing distributed depended on how each institution understood this form of charity. To offer second-hand or new garments would also depend on whether used clothing was available in the brotherhood. When *Misericórdias* also managed a hospital, there was almost always second-hand clothing around because many patients frequently left to the institution the property that they had with them. The property bequeathed to the institution could also include pieces of clothing. When this did not take place or when the existing number of garments on hand was not enough, clothes had to be bought.

Clothing protected the body, and it was frequently passed from person to person until it ended up with the poor. Shabbily dressed or in rags, the poor were easily identifiable by the clothes they wore. The question of appearance was of such importance that any help in being more outwardly presentable, through alms-giving, could be understood as a preventative measure against poverty and misery.²⁰

As in other types of alms, in order to receive gifts of clothing, it was also necessary to beg. In a written document, the poor would have to: state his identity, declare his place of dwelling, demonstrate his state of poverty and request the alms. The poor would call attention to their neediness and say that the clothing was “to cover the body” or “to cover the flesh.” Some women declared themselves to be “walking about naked.” The intent of this speech was to secure the alms-giving and should be placed in the context of a post-Council of Trent society where chastity, shame and modesty were highly valued.

Clothing was expensive and few poor people could buy it for themselves. They spent the majority of their income on food, and very little was left over for other necessities; thus, they turned to charity to replace pieces of clothing with better garments.

The calendar for distribution varied, possibly occurring all year round, but days almost always coincided with the religious holidays of Easter, St. Elizabeth’s Day, All Saints’ Day and Christmas, transforming these events into rituals of charity. Charity was

²⁰ Jean-Marie Le Gall, “La charité royale au début du XVI^e siècle”, in *Nouvelle Revue du XVI^e siècle*, 13/1, 1995, p. 63.

associated with these feast days and holidays, providing the *Misericórdias* with occasions for great dispersal of material and generosity.

Feeding the hungry always occurred when the *Misericórdias* assumed the care of those in hospital, in jail, in shelters, and orphanage schools and when they distributed bread, fish, meat, cereals or money to the poor that requested it regularly or who would come to the door.

The *Santa Casas* operated with a calendar of distribution for those needing small amounts, with foodstuffs or money being given out on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. At the previously-mentioned religious feast days, the handing out of alms took place in the same way yet in numbers that often reached hundreds or thousands of poor.

Beyond these poor, daily assistance was also given to the needy to continue on a journey or to feed their children or even to the old and incapacitated who needed help to survive. This poor population was made up of the elderly, the sick, and abandoned or orphaned children, in other words people who were unable to provide for their own subsistence.

The *Santa Casas* provided water for those housed in their institutions and had water taken to prisoners in jail. The service was normally done by a woman who was paid monthly to take water to those in prison. It is interesting to note that this practice of charity was more secondary when compared to the other works of mercy paid to the body. This situation is integrated into some remaining ones, a fact that underscores the strength of these institutions in the world of charitable giving.

Not all *Misericórdias* provided shelter to pilgrims; if they did not provide lodgings, they helped with alms in the form of *cartas de guia*²¹ given to people in transit on pilgrimage.

Pilgrimages in the Modern Period did not enjoy the vigorousness obtained during the Middle Ages. Despite this, there were still many people on pilgrimages of devotion to different sanctuaries. The journeys were expensive and slow, and not everyone who wanted to ask for a favour or thank a saintly protector had the means to do so without

²¹ Nominative documents which attest to the poverty of the bearer and allow for alms-giving at charitable institutions. Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo; Alexandra Patrícia Lopes Esteves, “Pasaportes de caridad: las “cartas de guia” de las Misericórdias portuguesas (siglos XVII-XIX)”, in *Estudios Humanísticos. História*, nº 6, 2007, pp. 224-225.

asking for help. They would beg along the way and when they arrived at the *Misericórdias* in a town or city, they would ask for a night's lodgings. When they administered pilgrims' hospitals, the *Santa Casas* would receive travellers for a limited amount of time, enabling the pilgrims to strengthen up for the ensuing journey. If an overnight stay was not possible, help to complete the journey was given in the form of alms.

As these institutions had the monopoly on burials beginning in 1593, these brotherhoods would bury not only their own members but all those who would pay for their services, and the poor as well.

To perform this service, the *Santa Casas* possessed all the necessary tools for burials: the flags, tombs and priests for the funerals. For the brotherhood members, the services available were much different than those for other deceased persons, but everything was a question of price. Whoever wanted and was able to pay for it could be buried in the tombs of the brothers. Price lists were distinct and corresponded to various tombs and services. The poor were buried without charge, or in other words, "for the love of God" in a much simpler tomb.

The itinerary of circulation of burials was predetermined, and the *Misericórdias* could only handle the deceased within the network of cities and towns found in certain urban centres and their outlying areas. However, especially in the smaller towns, these institutions were coerced into going into the countryside to collect the wealthier deceased in exchange for very generous alms. Often there was pressure to bury, without charge, the powerful of the land who were not brothers. Complicity was thick and influence-peddling could be felt amongst relatives, friends and simply amongst members of the same social status who did not want to see their peers buried with less dignity and pomp.²²

The members of the brotherhood were obliged by statute to be present at the burial of a fellow brother, accompanying them to their final resting place. It was a question of expressing a gesture of compassion and fraternity toward all.

²² Ana Cristina Araújo, *A morte em Lisboa. Atitudes e representações 1700-1830*, Lisboa, Ed. Notícias, 1997, pp. 271-283.

Burials became public events of great symbolic significance and power, organized to the smallest detail as a way to increase the membership of brothers and to raise funds in the form of property to be bequeathed over to them.

For other funerals, the *Misericórdias* functioned with small groups divided up for tasks and expected the brothers to faithfully execute them. However in the 18th century, the members were remiss in performing their services; they did not want to be pall-bearers and they conspicuously did not show up at burials. Absences would lead to warnings and for repeated failure, expulsion was ordered. Aware of the risks they would run, the members still failed to appear at burials, opening the institution up to ridicule and causing a scandal in the locality.

Beyond representing a source of conflict amongst the brothers, the burials also brought into the picture the parish priests of the boroughs where the institutions were located. With these priests, the *Santa Casas* did not always have a peaceful relationship. Various private interests held sway, and they did not always making for good understanding between the two parties.

The deep concern about obtaining salvation led men to invest a great amount or all of what they possessed for the sake of the soul. In the fulfilment of legacies, the *Misericórdias* were owners of imposing churches and rich sacristy treasures and boasted an extensive number of chaplains, as many as would be necessary to celebrate the thousands of masses annually that they had pledged to do.

Opened to the external world and not serving only their members but others as well, the Portuguese *Misericórdias* of the 1700s ritualized charity. Even during hard times and with serious internal problems that coloured the crisis in which others had plunged, they remained dynamic and active in their carrying out of the duties of charity.