

## Preface

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Several biographies have already been written about Peter Joseph Triest. The first one was published a year after his death, and since then several brothers and sisters of the congregations he founded have portrayed Triest's life and charism.

For the process of beatification, which has entered the Roman phase, a new biography had to be compiled on the basis of thorough research of sources. It became the 'official' biography of Peter Joseph Triest.

Of course, the existing biographies were used in the first place, but every fact was verified in the source material that was now collected and arranged for the first time. Inaccuracies were indeed discovered in the previous biographies, perhaps because certain sources were not yet known at the time of writing.

In compiling this biography, we owe a lot of thanks to Mr. Luc de Kezel, archivist of the Brothers of Charity, Mr. Vaast Vanoverschelde, historian, and Ms. Kaat Leeman, archivist of the Sisters of Charity, for their thorough examination of the collected documents. Thanks to their input, we now

have a reliable and scientifically sound biography of Peter Joseph Triest.

As in previous editions, we have tried to add colour to the factual material by sketching Triest's rich spiritual life, which has thoroughly guided his actions, like a panorama in the background. It gives us a good idea of who Triest was, the time in which he lived, what he did, and what his deeper motives were.

With the start of the beatification process of the now 'Servant of God Peter Joseph Triest', we were able to observe a renewed interest in this person whom we only know through his writings that he left us and through the congregations that he founded and that keep his legacy alive and up to date. It is therefore a good thing that this new biography has not only been preserved for the beatification dossier, but has now been made available in several languages to all those who like to be inspired by this person from a distant past whom we like to call 'Father Triest'. May it also be an invitation to follow with even greater interest and prayer the process of beatification and to have Father Triest as an inspiring guide, in the place where we live and work, to go to the poor and sick with love, like him. God's love was the driving force in his life and the source from which he radiated love to his neighbours, especially to those who lived on the fringes of society due to illness or poverty. It is this divine love that brought him to the periphery of existence, and others were inspired by him to go the same way of charity, even to this very day.

We would like to dedicate this biography to Bro. Eugene Geysen, who was the first postulator to lay the foundation of the process of beatification and, in fact, of this biography, with a great admiration for Father Triest and an infectious enthusiasm. For with infinite patience, he explored archives and added new elements which allowed us to get to know Peter Joseph Triest even better.

Peter Joseph Triest, Canon Triest, Father Triest, the Belgian Vincent de Paul, the good Mister Triest: these were names and titles that he received during his life and that marked him as a man, as a priest, as a founder, and as an advocate for those who had no voice in society. These are the aspects of his life that we would like to highlight in this biography and that we would like to share with you all, to serve as an inspiration to all of us.

Bro. René Stockman  
Brother of Charity



## Introduction

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In 1760, Peter Joseph Triest was born in Brussels. He was the ninth child of Jan Triest and Cecilia Mello, well-to-do citizens of the town. That is how most biographers start the biography of our Founder. Several biographies of Triest have already been written. Take the standard volume – the doctoral thesis of Lucienne Cnockaert, the unfinished work of Br. Orest Claeys f.c. and the seven-volume series written by a team of Brothers of Charity in the mid of last century.

The first biographer, Pierre De Decker, brother of Triest's successor, Canon Benedictus De Decker and a close acquaintance, wrote his memoirs in the year of Triest's death, 1836. His introduction makes a lasting impression:

“Many reasons have moved me to describe the life of Canon Triest: the desire to renew the memory of the virtues and capacities of this meritorious man, whom one may present as an abiding example of genuine and untiring charity. [...] From the beginning of his priestly career till his death, the poor and unfortunate had always been the object of his special love and care. A natural sensitivity,

not the loose and dismal sensitivity of the children of this world, but a manly and intelligent sensitivity to find means for the destitute, reigned supremely over all the ideas of his mind and the movements of his heart.”<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile his writings have been collected and arranged and published on several occasions articles, brochures and more vulgarizing editions about the life of Peter Joseph Triest, of Canon Triest, of Father Triest and since 2001 of the servant of God Peter Joseph Triest.

When we read Father Triest’s writings today, it strikes us how original and deep he was, how he lived an inspired life and how let himself be guided by the Holy Spirit in all his actions. Thus it is a lasting challenge to get to better know his life and his texts and to give them a place in our life. And it is also a task to translate them into our present time and context. Indeed, Father Triest has still a message for our time, and it is on this message that we want to reflect.