



## CAUSE P.J. TRIEST

News on the beatification

**Servant of God** Peter Joseph Triest

“*Treat everyone with gentleness and graciousness. Try to serve and please all as much as possible.*”

P. J. Triest, 1821



### NEWS OF THE CAUSE

In October 2021, we received good news from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints stating that the *Positio* as submitted had been approved and authorized for final printing with a foreword by the Relator General, Father Vincenzo Criscuolo, OFMCap.

It turned out to be a voluminous, doctorate-worthy, 526-page tome that consists of eight parts.

The first six pages feature the introduction of the Relator General, which he wrote on 13 May 2021, the feast of the Ascension of Jesus, and in which he presents his findings from the study of the *Positio*, approves of it, and expresses a first positive impression as to whether the Servant of God Peter Joseph Triest might be eligible for beatification and canonization.

This is followed by a brief historical overview of the life of the Servant of God and an outline of the Cause with the successive steps taken until today. The importance and significance of the Servant of God for the Church and society in his time and also for today is presented, as well. Especially the latter is important to indicate that Father Triest continues to inspire people in the Church and in society to this day.

The next section may be regarded as the heart of the *Positio*, where the virtues lived by Father Triest in an extraordinary way are explored. This description is the result of all the research that has been done in the past few years by so many people who have contributed to this process. This is an opportunity to thank them all once more. They have helped to bring to light much of what was unknown until now and to really illuminate the person of Father Triest. While reading, we can only be grateful to be able to

name such a person as our Founder and the desire only grows that he will be beatified so that even more people can draw from the spiritual treasure of his life.

This brings us to the fourth part, which includes the many testimonies that were given, adding a contemporary tone to the previous chapter. For this is how people today, religious, priests, and lay people, see Father Triest as a true example for their lives.

The fifth part contains the most important texts by Father Triest, which were referred to in the *Positio* and also in the biography, which is the sixth part. An extra section was added to the biography to give a clear picture of the ecclesiastical and social situation in which Father Triest lived. Indeed, this is difficult even for Italians who experienced the French Revolution in a totally different way, for example, or did not experience it at all.

The seventh part contains the reports of both the historical and the theological commissions, as well as a statement that so far there has been no public worship at the Servant of God's burial site. This is a condition strictly followed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Finally, there is a small iconography of images of Father Triest and of places with which these were associated.

It is fitting at this point to extend a special word of thanks to the Postulator, Dr. Waldery Hilgeman, and his associate Dr. Emanuele Spedicato, who have completed the *Positio* with great care and sound knowledge.

In the meantime, the historical commission has issued a highly favourable report, and on 25 May 2023, the *Positio* was submitted to the theological

commission, which similarly needs to deliver a verdict. It is for the theological commission to verify whether Father Triest indeed lived the virtues in an extraordinary way and whether his writings conform to theological doctrine. Once the latter commission has completed its work and will hopefully issue a favourable report, this will be passed on to the group of cardinals who are tasked with presenting a recommendation to the Pope, and when this is favourable too and the Pope accepts the recommendation, we will be able to bestow the Servant of God with the permanent title of 'Venerable', and the road to beatification will be completely open. All that is left at that point is for us to pray for a miracle! We trustingly place it in God's hands.

Bro. René Stockman  
Promoter of the Cause

### FATHER TRIEST AS AN ADVOCATE

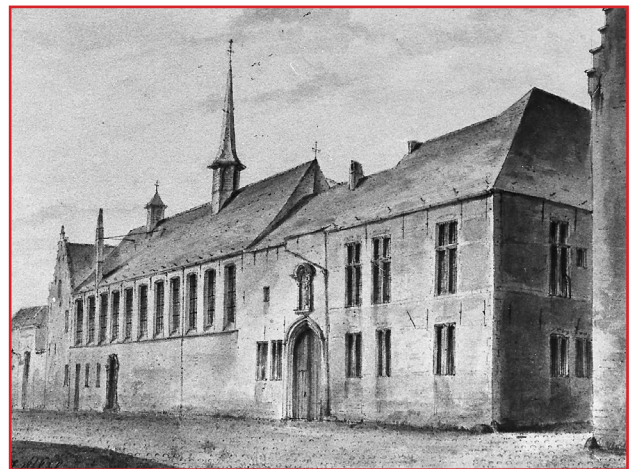
The early years of the Sisters of Charity were certainly not easy. Upon their arrival in Ghent, they were virtually unprepared for the task of caring for the terminally ill. A lot is revealed in a letter that Father Triest wrote, a letter of complaint in fact, to King William I of the Netherlands when in 1829 he reduced the maximum number of sisters permitted to serve in the Little Convent of Charity in Ghent from sixty to sixteen. Father Triest could not accept this and so he took up his pen and wrote directly to the King, with success apparently, for at the beginning of 1830 the number of sisters allowed to care for the terminally ill was brought back to sixty.

*"In Ghent, or even in the whole Kingdom, there was no hospital that took in the terminally ill, who are turned away in other hospitals because of their incurable and malodorous ailments. I was the first to start this foundation and left my presbytery in Lovendegem to devote myself, without any worldly rewards, to this charitable although difficult foundation, using my own means, a few private donations, and the earnings of some of the Sisters of Charity."*

It looks somewhat as if he is singing his own praises, but his intention is to make it clear to the King that this really is a private initiative and that, from the very beginning, there was no financial support from the government and he had to make do with donations and his own means. In a letter he had written to Emperor Napoleon back in 1806 to have the sisters recognized as hospital sisters, he also gave a description of these sick people's dire situation and the difficult work the sisters had taken upon themselves.

*"These victims of terrible diseases such as cancers and other incurable diseases were denied admission to the Civil Hospital. Therefore, they could be found in the streets, begging for food and help. They could not find a place to stay, because they were turned away everywhere. Their wounds could only arouse sterile compassion until the moment the Bishop of Ghent, Mgr. de Beaumont, asked me to come to their aid."*

Here, he refers to the time when he and six Sisters of Charity, under the direction of Mother Placida, came from Lovendegem to Ghent to start caring for these terminally ill. He was granted the abbey of Terhagen by imperial decree and also a sum of 3,500 francs to carry out repairs, but this was not enough to cover the costs of caring for these sick people. The work exceeded the capabilities of the sisters, who were limited in number and had to be available day and night to tend to these patients. Very soon, candidates and novices were



called in, but not all of them could cope with the work. Adequate staff and resources were Father Triest's constant concern, and he never missed an opportunity to appeal to the authorities to provide more resources for the care of those who were totally excluded from society. Gradually, the number of sick people increased and by 1828 there were 120 patients already. When in September of that year several sisters became ill themselves and even a novice died, he had had enough. Especially when, instead of allowing more staff, there was talk of limiting the number of sisters. And so, he wrote a very moving letter to the King. These few excerpts clearly show Father Triest's concern.

“Ah Sire, it grieves me to see that, for want of enough sisters to take on, many poor wretches are left helpless and cannot receive proper care. For my one aim and dearest wish is to assist and help suffering humanity, and I am sure that Your compassionate heart will not deprive me of this pleasure.”

“Reducing the number of sisters is that not mocking the sisters who sacrifice their lives to serve these sick people, and also my attempt to provide these sick people with the bare necessities?”

Father Triest is polite, but at the same time very clear in stating the problem, and especially his personal involvement is very much expressed in these words.

He goes on: “Sire, I am distraught and it pains me greatly not to know what I can or cannot do. Such a course of action is all the more painful for me since I am convinced that this antagonism, which is affecting the hospitals and homes that I founded with so much sacrifice and hard work and always try to run well, and which are now threatened with ruin by the ban on recruiting sisters and employing them there, has happened completely and entirely without your knowledge and awareness. Moreover, that this goes against your paternal and benevolent views and that the measure could be interpreted as if I were neglecting the duties incumbent upon me and therefore unworthy of your Majesty’s trust and favour.”

Having established the situation in very clear and unmistakable terms, Father Triest, like a good diplomat and advocate, tugs at the heartstrings by appearing to excuse the King but pointing out to him the consequences of the measure, which may have been taken without the King’s knowledge. The response was immediate and Father Triest was informed that he could again increase his staff to sixty sisters.

Finding the necessary financial means, together with the search for sufficient collaborators, was a constant worry for Father Triest. He was completely displeased when, at the founding of the new kingdom, he was in danger of losing the tax exemption he had obtained since 1814 for his hospital. With the little the Charity Office gave, a paltry 75 cents per day per patient, which was hardly enough to feed the sick, it was really impossible for him to pay this tax. Therefore, in February 1836, he wrote a clear petition to the Minister of Finance of the new Belgian government. Again, he tried to strike a chord by noting that it was unacceptable for Belgium to have a Catholic and people-oriented government that would be less humane and less charitable than a Protestant and despotic one. This problem had not yet been solved when he died in 1836, and the same concern to make ends meet weighed down on the shoulders of his successor Canon Benedict De Decker.



*Father Triest in audience with King William I, advocating for the beguines, 1825.*

We read somewhere about the French word “adoration”, a contraction of the words adoration and action, indicating the importance of always allowing a spiritual life to unfold in the daily events in which we must fully assume our responsibilities. This was certainly the case with Father Triest, and it is precisely as a result of a deep spiritual life that he always had the courage to go on, even when it was almost unreasonable in human terms. However, “love gives powers that nature cannot provide,” he wrote down somewhere. It reminds us of the storm on the sea where the Apostles panic and, after the storm has died down, are told by Jesus that they do not have enough faith. “Fear not, I am always with you,” may well have been Jesus’ answer, which was also a great encouragement for Father Triest to carry on in spite of everything! It became his “*davantage*” – Saint Vincent’s “always more”. He was called the Saint Vincent de Paul of Belgium for a reason.

Bro. René Stockman

#### Sources:

- Deneckere Gita, Het Gentse Sint-Vincentiusziekenhuis. De Zusters van Liefde J.M. en de ziekenzorg te Gent, 1805 tot heden. Gent, Zusters van Liefde, 1997, 176 p.
- Writings of Father Triest.

## THE DETECTIVE OF THE SAINTS

For the Church to declare a person a ‘saint’, a careful and meticulous investigation is required. A Sherlock Holmes-like task.

We are making a brief visit to another religious congregation, the Salesians, to find out about their position on the process of canonization.

Professor Lodovica Maria Zanet is one of the leading experts on the Causes of Saints. She has worked with the General Postulation of the Salesian Family since 2011. She is interviewed by Fr. Nallayan Pancras, SDB.



### **How did the idea of studying a person’s life in order to be able to declare them a saint come about?**

We have all had the experience of coming across people in life of particular merit, in whom the Gospel is reflected and embodied.

Well, the Church, mother and teacher, has that same concern for those who, in every part of the world, in every state of life, have lived a true Christian life and whose memory has been preserved even after many years.

Upon ascertaining this widespread ‘exemplariness’ shared by a large and significant part of the people of God, led by its pastors, the Church then implements a special procedure: that of the Causes of beatification and canonization.

This procedure is structured along various levels. Initially, it is mainly, quite descriptively, a matter of reconstructing, retrieving elements and writing about a person’s life without, however, rushing to judgment on it.

We can think of these Causes as functioning a bit like a heart: in two periods, diastole and systole. There is the ‘number one period’, the diastole, whereby one acquires evidence of virtue, martyrdom, the gift of one’s life or a miracle. This first period includes the *diocesan inquiries* and takes place where a Servant of God died or otherwise spent a significant part of his

or her life and therefore evidence, source material, is found. The ‘number two period’, the systole, occurs in the Roman phase and serves to study the evidence and demonstrates the virtues, martyrdom, etc. based on it.

### **And when it is a religious family, like the Salesians, who thinks of the saints?**

Inquiries always begin in the diocese: a Cause is first and foremost obedience to the Church, even in its local context. This, however, does not prevent a religious Family (or a Society of Apostolic Life, or a secular Institute, or a public Association of the faithful, etc.) from taking an interest in a Cause, asking the Church to support it, working on it and promoting it through initiatives of a pastoral nature as well, in the form of a ‘Postulation’.

‘Phase two’ on the other hand has as its point of reference not the diocesan bishop, but the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. It is during this Roman phase that a very extensive and articulate document is drawn up, several hundred pages long: the *Positio*. A true ‘plunge’ into the life of the Servant of God and the context of his testimony. One proceeds from level to level, all the way up to knocking on the ‘door’ of the Pope, the sole and supreme judge in the Causes of Saints.

### **So there are steps to climb.**

At first, a person born into Heaven having left the memory of a truly evangelical life is called a Servant of God. When there is a positive acknowledgement of his or her virtues, or martyrdom, or gift of life, the Servant of God becomes a ‘Venerable Servant of God’ (but the martyr then proceeds immediately to beatification): ‘venerable’, even terminologically, indicates a condition of possibility, specifying that the ‘papers are in order’. Then miracles are needed, which are necessary for the martyr to be declared a saint and for non-martyrs both for beatification and canonization: so a miracle for beatification; another miracle, occurring after beatification or at least after the authorization to promulgate the relative decree, for canonization. There are many steps. What is essential is that there is a true discernment. The timeframe, as a rule, is long. The work is intense.

### **When you can start talking about them in the Christian Community and when can you invoke them in public prayer?**

Servant of God is a name, a title that we like very much because it says something beautiful: having truly served God, in short, the heart of evangelical perfection. Actually, from a legal standpoint it ‘only’ indicates that the Church is investigating a person. Servants of God and Venerables can

certainly be invoked: in fact, it is appropriate that they should increasingly be made known because a Cause should serve to give glory to God and help those who are still on their way to the heavenly home. This, though, can be done individually, or as a group, but in a simple, spontaneous way either through authorized prayer or through the Novena, which is always authorized. Public worship – i.e. Mass, the Office (as ‘proper’ to the Breviary) and other particular and official acts – is instead: for the blessed at the local level (their diocese, religious order...); for the saint at a universal level, throughout the Church.

**In the case of Mamma Margherita, Don Bosco’s mother, who died in 1856, how does one gather evidence of her life?**

Mamma Margherita is Venerable: the high quality of her Christian life has already been recognized. Now there is the challenge of miracles obtained through her intercession. In that case, the Postulation could resume work to support her evaluation and recognition. After all, a Cause thrives only if it is sustained by a movement of prayer, and to prayer it should lead.

How to help Mamma Margherita? Animate prayer and encourage trust in her, throughout the Salesian world, including in the missions: firmly hoping for that ‘stronger grace’ that can be recognized as a miracle. Mamma Margherita is such a beautiful and topical figure: today especially family is put to the test and needs to rediscover the faith, but Mamma Margherita also speaks to consecrated persons or to those who dedicate themselves to others out of a greater love, because in the last part of her life she brought up children who were not her own with such care.

**The Pope speaks of the ‘saint next door’. What is the ‘substance’ of true holiness?**

*Holiness next door* is a powerful expression. It also helps us not to equivocate the seriousness of a journey of faith with the search for extraordinary signs, to which one clings as if to the confirmations one needs, as a claim to always be able to ‘see’ and ‘touch’ and ‘feel’. True things are first and foremost inconspicuous.

In the Causes – let us take the simplest example, that of the heroic virtues – before even getting to the point of *being able to speak* of a miracle, one looks at the daily life of the Servant of God, their daily behaviour, their choices and above all at their humility and the exercise of charity even in difficult situations (I would go so far as to say: even in situations where one cannot pretend or improvise!). This is the path that the Church urges us to take, but

it is also the path that the saints first took: starting from ordinary everyday life, cherishing it. A true saint is not someone who wants to draw attention to himself through spectacular gestures. Instead, the true saint always considers himself small and a sinner, and the very meaning of his life is to bring others to look to God.



**How can one tell that a life has been lived to a heroic degree, in other words, a very high degree?**

To understand this, it may help to consider a number of requirements. We can try to list them analytically, with one premise, however: our life is not analytical, it is synthetic, it is a unit. So the list draws attention to certain aspects that are actually intertwined. Let us give an example. A virtue (our charity, our obedience, our poverty...) is heroic if it is exercised: always, promptly, readily, joyfully, even in difficult situations. Furthermore: in a manner superior to how a – take note! – good and righteous person would act under the same conditions (canonized holiness is 10 and praise compared to 8, not 6 compared to 3...). Also, if it is exercised with supernatural purpose, for the love of God. Some other examples: humble... even in humiliation. Obedient... even when I do not feel like it, with a glad heart, at peace, trusting. Wanting good... even from an enemy. Poor... not just surrendering superfluous goods, but opening myself to sincere sharing, making communion. These are examples that open up avenues for reflection and help us look differently at mankind.

**Does one have to be happy all the time to be a saint?**

Joy flourishes as the fruit of the Spirit. The Church does not seek the rigour of a person who is too strict with himself, too rigid: but rather a surge of goodness that is fragrant with the Gospel and ultimately a gift from God. The other aspect – which I think is so important for young people today – is that the Church, even in the Causes of canonization, does not require one to have been heroic *all one’s life*: instead, it looks at *the last period*. Let’s say the last 10 years or so, which will be less in the case of the very young, and more for older saints. What is

important is the path you have taken, how you have grown, the crises you have gone through and the confidence with which you have overcome them. In the history of holiness, there is room for great converts, for those who discovered the Lord later in life. There is even room for those who wanted to fight him before really encountering him. The important thing is that from a given moment, their life has taken a turn for the better to become an icon of the Gospel, a witness of charity.

**However, there may be moments of weakness even in these people who are heroic. Could catching even hints of weakness stop the Cause? What degree of gravity could stop it?**

Earlier we were talking about the *Positio*, this corpus of evidence that is submitted to the Vatican. It is written following a strict order of arguments and does not lack a part that can be devoted to possible faults of the Servant of God. Everything is significant and any contrary elements should always be highlighted. It is between these often problematic cracks that an encounter with God can make its way: no life should be oversimplified. Even the great saints have had difficulties or have experienced frailty. The essential thing is that ‘structures of sin’ do not take root forever and, as I said, that from a certain moment we can discern a convincing path of good, a lasting fruit through which life for others flows. After all, when life really does ‘turn around’, the first to notice it is indeed our neighbour!

Source: *Il Bollettino Salesiano*

### **POPE FRANCIS: ‘SAINTS DO NOT COME FROM A PARALLEL UNIVERSE’**

What does it look like to be a Catholic saint today? A Vatican conference taking place in Rome this week has been discussing just that.

Speaking to the “Holiness Today” conference on Oct. 6, Pope Francis underlined that saints are not disconnected from the realities of daily life, but faithfully live the Gospel to the fullest within the communities in which they find themselves.

“Saints do not come from a ‘parallel universe’, but are believers who belong to God’s faithful people and are firmly grounded in a daily existence made up of family ties, study, and work, social, economic, and political life,” Pope Francis said in the Apostolic Palace.

“In all these settings, the saints strive constantly, without fear or hesitation, to carry out God’s will.”

Pope Francis pointed to the example of Blessed Carlo Acutis, who died as a high school student in 2006, as “a model of Christian joy for teenagers and young people.”



Holiness “is not primarily a matter of struggle and renunciation,” the pope said. “First and foremost, it is the realization that we are loved by God and freely receive his love and mercy.”

The pope also shared the less contemporary example of St. Francis of Assisi. He emphasized that the witness of the Church’s canonized saints is timeless and never loses its relevance.

“The saints are precious pearls ... they provide a fascinating commentary on the Gospel. Their lives are like a catechism in pictures, an illustration of the Good News that Jesus brought to humanity,” he said.



The pope highlighted how the universal call to holiness was at the heart of the Second Vatican Council.

“Today too, it is important to appreciate the sanctity present in God’s holy people: in parents who raise their children with love, in men and women who carry out their daily work with dedication, in persons who patiently endure sickness and infirmity, and in the elderly who keep smiling and sharing their wisdom,” he said.

“The witness of a virtuous Christian life given daily by so many of the Lord’s disciples represents for all of us an encouragement to respond personally to our own call to be saints.”

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, the prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, spoke at the conference’s opening on “the fame of holiness in the digital age.”



The cardinal said that a solid and widespread *fama sanctitatis*, or reputation for holiness, has always been a fundamental requirement for initiating a cause for beatification and canonization, but that the issue is especially topical as “the digital age poses new and urgent challenges.”

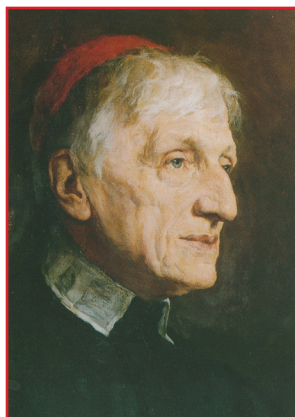
Pope Francis addressed some of these challenges in his speech to the conference participants. On one hand, he said that media could help more people to learn about the Christian life of individual candidates for beatification or canonization.

“However, in the use of digital media, and social networks, in particular, there can be a risk of exaggeration or misrepresentation dictated by less than noble interests,” he added.

“Consequently, there is a need for wise discernment on the part of all those who examine the contours of the reputation of holiness.”

Semeraro noted that this prerequisite for opening a cause for beatification had “taken a back seat” in recent decades. In response, the Vatican’s saints office issued a letter to all of the world’s bishops last year requesting that they verify the consistency and authenticity of a sainthood candidate’s reputation for holiness.

When speaking about the “heroic virtue” required for canonization today, Semeraro quoted St. John Henry Newman: “If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say, first—Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God’s glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts;



make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect.”

Source: Courtney Mares, Catholic News Agency

## TESTIMONY

I had my first kidney stone surgery in 2014, and here I am again in May 2021 with severe pain in the lower part of my bladder, which is even preventing me from passing water. I couldn’t sleep during the day or night. After the ultrasound, the results were as follows: there were several stones in my bladder, blocking the flow of urine. I was admitted to hospital on 30 May 2021. Catheters were inserted to relieve me while I waited for further specialist tests. On 9 June 2021, the catheter malfunctioned and when the nurse on duty failed to replace it, I bled profusely and a urologist was rushed in. He put in a new catheter and decided to have an emergency operation with a prescription for 90 serums, 4 blood bags, and 4 different shaped catheters, plus other special tests. On 12 June at 3 p.m., I was taken to the operating unit. Once on the operating bed, in the presence of the anaesthesiologist, two nurses, and the doctor, I asked them to give me two minutes before the operation: after a sign of the cross, I prayed the prayer for the beatification of the Servant of God P.J. Triest until the end. After the operation, with a lot of pain while I was in the intensive care unit, I had no other words in my mouth than the same prayer. I spent a month in hospital under the protection of the Servant of God.

Since then, I have never stopped praying this prayer every day, without forgetting the one to commemorate our Founder.

A week after I was discharged from hospital, a local church pastor was operated on for the same illness as me. Unfortunately for him, he died in the operating room. This is the testimony of the person in charge of the operating room who came to visit me at home.

S.N.

## NEW PUBLICATION:

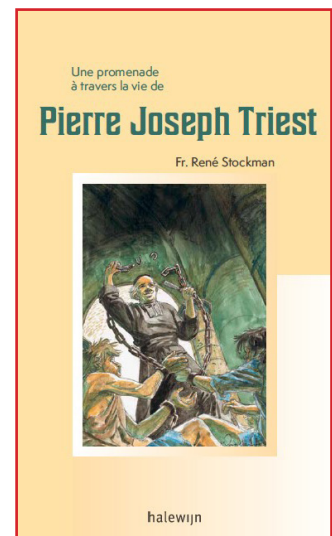
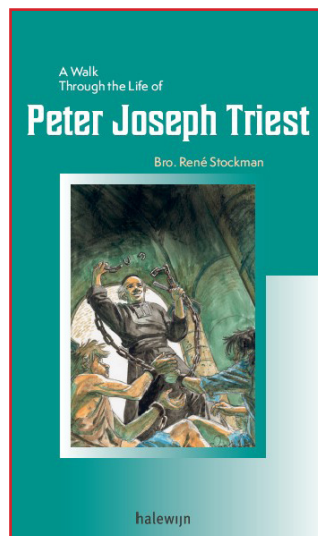
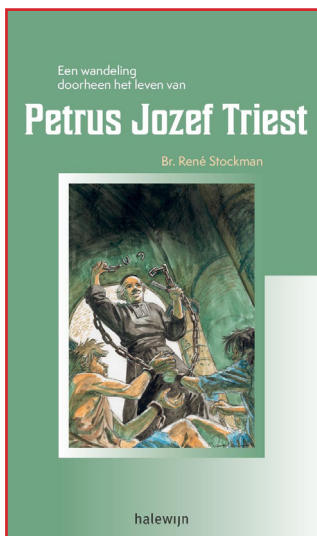
### A WALK THROUGH THE LIFE OF PETER JOSEPH TRIEST

In this book, Brother René Stockman approaches the figure of Peter Joseph Triest, founder of four congregations, from a narrative perspective. The historical facts remain the basis of the storyline, but they have been embellished with pigments and flavourings. Brother Stockman has added conversations and descriptions that may not have taken place in a literal sense, but which allow the reader to immerse themselves in the various situations of life in which Triest found himself.

After all, by spending years exploring Father Triest's life story and drawing spiritual nourishment from the many texts he left behind, Brother Stockman feels he has come to know Triest quite well as a person.

The story is not meant to dwell on the past, but is an invitation to take something away from it for our own lives today.

This book was published in Dutch by Halewijn and subsequently translated into English and French. The French version is currently being printed, but it can be ordered already by clicking on the image of the book.



For a full list and more information about ordering publications on Father Triest, please visit our website at [www.causapjtriest.org](http://www.causapjtriest.org).

You can also order by contacting the Cause Secretariat using the details below.



[www.causapjtriest.org](http://www.causapjtriest.org)

### QUESTIONS, FAVOURS, AND ANSWERED PRAYERS

All questions concerning the process of beatification, favours received, and prayers answered can be directed to the Cause Secretariat.

Secretariat of the P.J. Triest Cause

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