

# Ven. HERMANN COHEN OCD



*by*  
FR MATT BLAKE OCD

## **Ven. Hermann Cohen OCD**

### ***a talk by Fr Matt Blake OCD***

**Broadcast 21 February 2021 from the Carmelite Priory, Kensington\***

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I begin with his death – he died on 21st January 1871 – which is more or less exactly 150 years ago, so we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of his death. The other important link, and a sad one in view of what is going on in our time, was that he died in the midst of a pandemic. He died in Berlin, where he had gone as the Franco-Prussian war was on. Being a German citizen living in France, he had to leave quickly, initially to Switzerland, but then word came that they needed a priest in Berlin to minister to the French soldiers who were held there as prisoners of war. Hermann went to Berlin, and while he was there an epidemic of smallpox broke out among the prisoners. He was given instructions as to what he could and could not do, but sadly he didn't take the necessary precautions when anointing one of the prisoners, so he picked up the illness and died shortly afterwards. He was just over fifty years of age. A few days later the war will end, with terrible consequences for France.

The news of Hermann Cohen's death went all over Europe. This was big news and gives us a sense of how well known this man was. His death was a devastating blow for the friars in France. It's one thing for me to give you facts about Hermann Cohen's life – and I will give you quite a lot of those – but, to have any understanding of Hermann Cohen, we have got to understand a little about the history of Europe and the situation of the Carmelite order in Europe at that time.

I'll begin by saying something about his early life. He was born in Hamburg on 10 November 1820 into a family of Jewish business people. But there's very little evidence of any religious practice, so he's Jewish by race and by culture. As he would say in a sermon a long time after he became a Christian, *I'm still a wandering Jew*. He has that sense of being Jewish right throughout his life, but there is no evidence that at any stage of his life he could in any way be considered a practising Jew, and he makes it clear that he was an atheist. He was one of six children, five of whom survived to adulthood.

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From the age of four he begins seriously playing the piano. By the age of seven he gives his first concert. So, this is a child prodigy and music is going to dominate the life of this great pianist, organist, composer: music is what's going to make Hermann famous throughout Europe. From the age of four, music pretty much dominates the life of this young boy. So much so, that any formal education that he might have had

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ends more or less when he is ten, and there's little evidence that he got much up until then – music was everything. In 1832 his mother decides to take him to Paris where he could get a much better professional training in music and he succeeds in getting sponsorship. (Even though the family were quite wealthy, they were actually on the verge of bankruptcy at this stage, with the businesses failing). The difficulty when he arrived in Paris was that, not being a French citizen, the Paris Conservatoire would not accept him. The father had refused to come to Paris, and his mother was on her own there, having poured everything into her son — and they wouldn't accept him. But she persuades Franz Liszt to take him on. This was much against his initial reaction, but when Liszt heard the young Hermann play for the first time, he realised that there was something special there. So, Liszt takes him on as a student. This goes fine for a little while, until Liszt falls in love and decides to move to Geneva, and he refuses to take Hermann with him. However, Hermann is so determined that he goes anyway. He arrives in Geneva and, despite objections from Liszt's new partner, who's very jealous of Hermann and doesn't want him around the place, Liszt takes him back. (In the relationship of Hermann and Liszt they're very close companions, they travel everywhere together and then they completely fall out and then they're reconciled again. This pattern seems to repeat itself over and over again).

At the age of fifteen Hermann becomes a Professor of Music at the Conservatoire in Geneva, which has just been founded, and is taking on his own students. This man is a very, very gifted musician, composing, playing, teaching. In 1841 he finally breaks with Liszt (although he will appear in his life again). By now they have travelled all over Europe together and Hermann is known everywhere. He moves back to Paris, which is a sort of base over these years, although he moves around all over the place. He finally falls in love with a lady called Celeste Mogador; it doesn't last long, but it is the one serious love relationship of his life. It doesn't last long because conversion is there somewhere in the background and, not long after he breaks up with her, he will convert to Christianity.

One thing that is important for our understanding of Hermann and his mentality, his psychology, is that he becomes addicted to gambling and that is an enormous issue: not just the gambling, but the addiction. We could say he is an addictive personality. Of course, the gambling gets him into all kinds of trouble and he runs up enormous debts and that becomes a major issue for him. At one stage it almost gets to the point of destroying his music – he is not rehearsing, he is not putting the effort into his music, he is so engrossed in gambling. This addictive personality is going to show itself over and over again, though he finally breaks with gambling and it appears that he paid off most of his debts. Just before becoming a Christian he puts on a special concert to try and pay off some of his debts, so we think he paid off a lot of them but probably not all.

What changes? 1847 is really the year when things change and he would make it very clear to us that the change was the work of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Eucharist. There are two incidents in particular, in both of which he is playing the organ during Benediction. First of all in the church of St Valery in Paris and a few months later in Ems in Germany – very similar spiritual experiences during Benediction when he was playing the organ, which were to set the theme of his life. I'll read an extract here from one of his sermons in which he describes this for us. It helps us to see how he understood his conversion.

*Mary obtained for me from the God of the Eucharist a cure infinitely more important to me than that of my bodily eyes – that is, freedom from my blindness. It was the month of Mary and they were singing hymns. Mary the mother of Jesus revealed the Eucharist to me. I knew Jesus, I knew God. Soon I became a Christian. I asked for baptism and before long the holy water was flowing over me. At that moment, all the many sins of my twenty-five years were wiped out. Brethren, God pardoned me, Mary pardoned me. Will you not pardon me too?*

That just gives us a sense of what his conversion was about, what it meant to him. If we were to ask the question, what is the spirituality of Hermann Cohen, two things stand out – his devotion to Mary and his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist – and the connection between them. It is Mary who brought him to the Eucharist: the Eucharist would become his mission. He is described as the *Missionary of the Eucharist* for Europe for the nineteenth century. He begins this mission right after baptism. On 28 August 1847 he is baptised, and his First Communion takes place on 8 September of the same year, and later his Confirmation on 3 December. And he throws himself into Christian life and particularly into promoting devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, organising Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Night Adoration, all of this, which he will become famous for all over Europe. That begins straight away as his mission.

In the following year, history intervenes – 1848 is the year of revolution in France and the beginning of what's known as the French Second Republic. Hermann participates a little bit in this but his mind is going in other ways and it is going toward the priesthood and towards religious life. It appears that the first place he tried was the Benedictines, and one would think it was a natural fit for him, and they turn him down. He then consulted with a Dominican. It's not clear whether the Dominicans actually turned him down or whether it's simply that the Dominican priest he consulted advised that the Dominicans were not the right place for him – either way, Carmel is his choice. He enters Carmel in 1849 and begins his novitiate on 19 July 1849.

I will now pick up another story. To understand what Hermann is coming into, we've got to understand something about the Discalced Carmelite Order in those times. When Hermann joined the Discalced Carmelites, they were not one order as we are today. The Discalced Carmelite friars only became one religious order in 1875, which is four years after Hermann Cohen's death. In 1593, two years after St John of the Cross' death, the sons of St Teresa and St John of the Cross split into two. They split into what would become the Spanish congregation and the Italian congregation. So, there are two separate congregations with separate constitutions, separate leadership and, perhaps what is most critical, two different understandings of what it meant to be sons of St Teresa, two different interpretations of the Teresian charism. That will carry on, and then there will be the further complication of a third, Portuguese congregation, but let's leave that on one side.

In 1835 that radically changes, because the Order is effectively wiped out in Spain by the political situation; only one house actually survived. All religious communities of men were driven out of Spain. (Not of women: the women were more or less left alone.) That effectively destroyed the Spanish congregation. The only places where

the Spanish friars had communities were Spain and Mexico, and although the Mexicans continued, they were quite often going their own ways and they weren't in the healthiest of states anyway. The Italian congregation, on the other hand, was present in Italy, France and Germany, along with a few missions in various places, particularly in the Arab world and in India, where they had a small presence. Again, in most of these countries at various times the Order was suppressed. There is almost a pattern of flourishing and then the political situation changing everything. In France, for example, they were wiped out at the French revolution. Italy had really only got going again by the 1830s but by Hermann Cohen's time the Order is doing pretty well in Italy. Germany is a very small presence. Belgium, Flanders, yes, they're doing OK there, but beyond that – that's the limit of the Order. So, by the 1840s there is no presence of the Discalced Carmelite friars in France, no community. But there are a lot of individual friars who crossed the Pyrenees, such as Francisco Palau.

I want now to pick up the story of one man, Père Dominique, a highly qualified friar who had taught in Burgos and other college of the order in Spain and in 1839 he crosses the Pyrenees into France and goes to Bordeaux. His plan is to go to Mexico. A lot of the friars either left the religious life, left the priesthood, or became diocesan priests or drifted off in other directions: and Père Dominique wanted to stay in the Order, and the only place he felt he could go was Mexico and his plan was to go to Bordeaux to try and get on a ship and go there. However, the Prioress of the Carmelite Convent in Bordeaux has other ideas. She wants to restart the Carmelite friars in France and now the ideal candidate turns up. They don't exactly get on immediately, but they come to an agreement eventually. And in 1841 Père Dominique begins the first house for friars, and it's Spanish. He brings together some Spanish friars and starts taking in French vocations. The order rapidly grows, so much so that later on, by 1867, they will have two Provinces in France. Of course, Père Dominique was a member of the Spanish congregation, not of the Italian congregation. Although the Spanish congregation was wiped out in 1835, it still has a Procurator General in Rome in charge of relations with the Holy See and representing the Order there, and so Père Dominique goes to him and asks for his support for the foundation and the answer is, *Absolutely no*. And we might ask, what's going on, what's in the mentality? Surely, since they've lost all these houses, and here's someone who wants to start it up again, surely he'll support him? But there's a mentality deep within the psyche of the Spanish Carmelites that the Teresian reform is culturally Spanish and it can really only be started off in Spain. That's why they didn't set up any missions outside – except Mexico, and they didn't even allow the Mexicans to expand into other parts of Latin America or North America.

So, that's the scenario. Père Dominique is a very influential person and is going to set the Order up and it's into this that Hermann Cohen comes. Why does Hermann Cohen choose the Carmelites? It's difficult to know. I want to quote a little bit from a letter he wrote to his mother and his family, explaining to them why he chose the Carmelites. It gives us a sense of what's going through his mind: *I have chosen a life of solitude, silence, retirement, a hidden life and unknown, a life of self-denial*. That's a great sentence. Of course, when we look at the life that Hermann Cohen lived, he's all over the place, he's travelling the whole of Europe. It's not solitude, it is not a hidden life, but at the same time there's a pull toward solitude and silence in him, very definitely, and not only that, but the emphasis he puts upon self-denial, that's

going to be strong in his life and in this we can see the addictive personality re-emerging. Hermann goes to excess in all sorts of different ways and it's typical of him to choose the order that he sees as having greatest self-denial, the greatest of penances. There's an attraction towards excess, it's part of his addictive tendencies. He goes on then, *In short, I find myself in the novitiate of a religious order celebrated in history for its austerities, its penances and its love of God.* Surely we would put the love of God first? He puts it third. Now he goes to the other thing that draws him, or at least how he justifies it to his family – *this order had its beginning among the Jews 930 years before the birth of Christ and was founded by the Prophet Elias on Mount Carmel in Palestine.* That was how the history of the Order was understood at that time; nobody would have questioned the historical accuracy at that time, historical research came decades later, and for his Jewish family that's his emphasis. *It is an order of true Israelites of the children of the prophets who looked for the Messiah, who believed in him when he came and who have perpetuated their order to our own day, always living in the same manner, with the same bodily privations and the same joy of heart as they lived on Mount Carmel 2,800 years ago.*

That gives us a sense of Hermann's motivation and how he sees the Order, how he presents it. It also shows us Hermann as a person of his time, both in the Carmelites' understanding of what it meant to be a Carmelite and in the theology of the time. It is something that will be a source of great pain to him and to other Jews. There is a lovely sermon he gives, *The profession of a fellow Jew*, in which he speaks about his mother and the love for a mother, but if they do not become Christian, they are not saved, outside of the Church there is no salvation. Hermann takes that very much to heart and strongly believes it and preaches it, because that was the understanding of the time. And he is very much a person of his time, although he keeps a good relationship with his family and some of his family did become Christian, though his mother or father did not. Hermann doesn't mention in that letter what were obviously the two strongest motives: Mary – and he would have seen Carmel as Mary's Order; and the importance of the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist, and St Teresa's love for the Eucharist and all of this which he speaks about elsewhere.

So, he enters the novitiate at Le Broussey just outside Bordeaux, which at that time would have been very austere. It has also been described, and rightly so, as very Spanish, because the novice master spoke very little French. It was very Spanish in mentality, in outlook. The divide in the Order was not just a juridical divide but a cultural divide between the Italian and Spanish congregations. But novices are coming, and very quickly, and there is rapid growth. It would have been austere and very difficult. Despite Hermann's strong enthusiasm and desiring this, and his addictive personality and the enthusiasm of a recent convert and his sense of mission that this is for the Eucharist, he would have found it difficult. The Prior of that community, writing some years later and reflecting back on Hermann Cohen's experience in the novitiate, makes an interesting comment. He says that, above all else, there were three deprivations that really affected Hermann. One was that he had to give up smoking; he had to give up taking snuff; and he had to give up coffee. The Prior's comment was that they hadn't understood at the time the effect these three deprivations would have on Hermann's health. His health was suffering, and he had to go back on all three later – in a small way, the Prior says. The addiction again comes to the fore in all kinds of different ways.



Having said all that, there's also evidence that Hermann was no normal novice. Firstly, he is a very famous man musically, he's a celebrity all over Europe, so his conversion and entering the Order were well known. But secondly, he has already established a ministry for himself in the Church, promoting devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, before he entered. In the Novitiate in those days you were given no choice of what room, what cell you got, you were told where to go. Hermann was allowed, we are told, to choose the cell nearest to the chapel so that he would live nearest to the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament. He was given that choice. Secondly, he was allowed to continue his ministry. He wasn't allowed to travel around, but he was in correspondence all the time with leaders of the nocturnal devotion that he had started all over the place. This would have been unheard of in the normal Carmelite novitiate of the time. So, there is a recognition that this novice is special.

He makes his profession 7 October 1850, and then it was one profession, there was no temporary and final profession, this was his profession for life. Just six months later, he's ordained a priest, 19 April 1851. Now, we have to ask, did he do any studies for the priesthood? I can find no record of his doing any studies for the priesthood. As I've said, he has no education beyond ten years of age, if he had much before then, so he's really a man with no formal education and no formal studies for the priesthood – there doesn't seem to have been any, or very little, even in that six month period from October to April when he's meant to be doing studies. His ordination was meant to be in June at the feast of Pentecost, but the bishop wasn't going to be there so it was moved forward to Holy Saturday, which is a very unusual day for an ordination. Easter Sunday would make sense, but not Holy Saturday – it was all to do with the availability of the bishop. So, there was a rush to get this man ordained. But during those six months Père Dominique, who was very influential on Hermann, had already starting taking Hermann around with him on his travels, founding houses and ministries. But also, he asked Hermann to do some composing. A Sister had written some canticles and he wanted Hermann to put them to music and he put pressure on Hermann to get them finished fast. There seem to have been two reasons for this. During the novitiate Hermann was not allowed to compose and Dominique did recognise that this was a major loss, and that a musician needed to play music and compose, so getting him composing again was important for his psychological well-being. But secondly, he saw the usefulness of Hermann for the work he was doing in founding houses. There was money to be made here. Hermann was making money out of his music and he had the capacity to raise funds which they so badly needed. Dominique was a practical man as well, and wanted the help of Hermann, who becomes effectively his assistant in founding the Order in France, building up the discalced friars in house after house. So, he's ordained, and that's a very important event: priesthood is very important for him.

When Hermann entered the Order, he was given the name Augustine Maria of the Blessed Sacrament, and that was common in those days, and often he is known as Père Augustin, but most people right throughout his life still referred to him as Hermann. A few years ago, here in Kensington, our then organist, Bruce Ogston, who used to play Hermann's music a lot, asked me why all the music that Hermann composed, both before he entered the Order and afterwards, is all put down as 'Hermann,' he never used his surname, which is very unusual for composers. Some people suggest it's because he was Jewish – that's unlikely. He never hid the fact that he was Jewish, and he used his surname Cohen all the time: he was known as

Hermann Cohen the musician. So, we don't know the reason, but Hermann was what was always put on his music.

I will mention now the involvement of Hermann Cohen with Lourdes. In 1858 Our Lady appeared to Bernadette at Lourdes. Hermann is at this time very near there, having founded a desert house of the Carmelite Order at Tarasteix nearby. He meets with Bernadette 21 September 1858. She's reluctant to meet him, as she has been given a very poor reception by some priests and by some civic leaders, but Hermann supports her, completely supports her. Not only that, but he has three distinctions when it comes to Lourdes. One is that he led the first pilgrimage to Lourdes, even though there were barricades to stop people approaching the grotto and, because Hermann Cohen was leading, it a huge crowd turned up, as they would wherever he went. He gave an important speech there and led the prayers and Benediction and blessed himself with the water etc. That's not actually recorded in some of the histories of Lourdes, because it was before any permission had been given to have pilgrimages to Lourdes, but it definitely happened. Secondly, he has the distinction of composing music for the first hymn specifically written for Lourdes, and thirdly he paid for the first banner or flag that was made for pilgrims going to Lourdes.

But that's not the end of the story. About ten years later he's back again in the desert house at Tarasteix and his eyesight is failing badly. He goes to the top specialist in France at the time, who said, there's very little can be done, we could do surgery but that might leave you totally blind – basically he was going blind. He began a novena to Our Lady of Lourdes and in the last days of the novena he went to Lourdes and bathed himself in the water and all of that; and each day, he tells us, during the novena, his eyesight improved and by the end it was perfect, and for the rest of his life he never had a problem with his eyesight. The specialist could not explain it in any way: it was just a miracle. Think back to the piece that I read earlier on, when we were speaking about his conversion, written so many years before about Our Lady taking away his blindness, opening his eyes to the light – and later she would physically do that for him, that miracle. So, his connection with Lourdes is an important one and he will be an important supporter and promoter of Lourdes. Having such a big figure support Bernadette and Lourdes at the very beginning was very significant.

How does he end up in Kensington? We come to 1862 and he's in Rome. It's not Hermann's first visit to Rome. He had been to Rome as a musician. He'd also been to Rome because when they were arranging his entry into the Order, they discovered that there was a canonical problem: they couldn't accept a Jewish convert so early after Baptism, and he appealed to Rome, to the General of the Order, and the answer was, *No*. So, he decides to go and speak himself with the Pope. He gets to Rome to discover that, because of the political situation, the Pope isn't in Rome, he's in Gaeta, in fact he was actually in Naples at the time. But the General Definitory of the Order were actually meeting in Rome at the time, and maybe it was his presence or whatever he said to them, but they changed their minds and they agreed, so he didn't have to go to the Pope.

But now, 1862, he's back in Rome again. The reason for this visit is the canonisation of martyrs in Japan. Now there's other reasons as well why he's there, other business he has there, but also in Rome is Cardinal Wiseman, who is the first Archbishop of

Westminster after the restoration of the hierarchy in England. One of the policies of Wiseman is to bring religious orders to England, which he's very anxious to do, and he meets with Hermann Cohen and asks Hermann to come to England and to set up a community of Carmelite friars in London. And that's fine, they go to the General of the Carmelite Order and he says, *No*. So, they have to go to the Pope, and this time he does meet the Pope, Pius IX, who overrules the Carmelites and gives Hermann permission to go to England. I mentioned that Hermann was given the name Augustine and, of course, the Pope said, *Oh, I'm sending another Augustine to England. Like Pope Gregory sent Augustine of Canterbury all those centuries earlier, I am sending you for the conversion of England.* (Of course, it was actually Augustine of Hippo he was called after). Something else, incidentally that happened in Rome on that visit was that Franz Liszt was also in Rome at the time and there was a final reconciliation between them. As I said before, there were fallings out and reconciliations over the course of a lifetime but this was the final reconciliation. Liszt is now a Franciscan tertiary and a cleric – he's not a deacon or a priest, but he has received the minor orders and is called Reverend Liszt. So, he's gone through a conversion experience himself, there's a reconciliation between the two of them, and they're friends from then on.

Being sent to England constituted an enormous change in Hermann's life. To give a sense of the change, I want to read from a letter that he wrote to his brother Albert on 17 August 1862, shortly after arriving in England: *I have to admit that to me it's a real sacrifice to leave France, where my role as a priest and religious gave me so much consolation. Here I cannot even leave the house without changing out of my Carmelite habit and dressing in a black coat, stiff white collar and a black scarf and this wretched collar imprisons my neck, my head, my thoughts and my heart. I'm only half alive, but no matter, since religious life is one of sacrifice, why not take a few more steps forward when it's a question of helping so many Catholics of all nations who are scattered throughout this huge city of London and, as far as any religious assistance is concerned, abandoned almost entirely to themselves.* That's his first impressions of London. He's finding it very difficult, and one of the difficulties is the language. He has some English and he has been to London before. He was there as a musician, when he was well-known, had quite a reputation and quite a lot of contacts, so he was familiar with London, but a very different London to the religious one. He's now back as a priest, but having to leave behind the life he had in France, the success and the reputation he had there, and really struggle in a very alien environment.

He comes here to Kensington, to Kensington Square. The Sisters of the Assumption have been there for some years now, and they give him a house, No. 24 Kensington Square, and that would become the first Carmelite Priory. On 15 October of that year was the official opening. Present of course at the opening were Wiseman and Manning. Cardinal Wiseman will die in 1863, the following year, and Manning will take over. These two most important figures in the restoration of the hierarchy of the English church are both present, as is William Faber, who founds the Oratory, and many others. It's a big event – even though the house is very small, the chapel is very small. I want to quote from Hermann Cohen's speech, and we're told it was very long, in French, but here's a little quote. *The reason for the foundation of the Carmelites in England is to counteract the three principal errors of Protestantism: the denial of the unity of the Catholic Church, the denial of the real presence of Christ*

*in the Eucharist and the denial of the Immaculate Conception.* (1854 the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was defined by the Catholic Church so those three were what he picks out as the principal errors of Protestantism). And, he goes on to say, *To counteract those, this new foundation is going to demonstrate eloquently the unity of the Catholic Church by the presence of priests from many different backgrounds and cultures and they will integrate well with the local clergy.* That's an interesting point to put there. Two years later he will be in Belgium for a conference on European Catholicism and he will give a famous speech there on the state of the Catholic Church in England. One of the things he will say in that speech is that in England, the religious clergy – that is, priests who are members of religious orders – and the diocesan clergy have a very good relationship, not like, he says, in other countries. The Archbishop of Paris who was there was very angry and took grave exception to Hermann Cohen's speech and particularly to that comment, because he interpreted it as a jibe to France.

It's interesting that the first motive for the Carmelites coming to London was the unity of the Church, and it will be manifested particularly by the composition of the community of friars in Kensington and the very good relationship between them and the local clergy. The second – the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist – will be given honour with the benediction, blessing of this new tabernacle and will be venerated and adored. And, of course, he will begin Eucharistic Adoration in London from the time he arrives, and it will be one of his great legacies to the English Church. And thirdly, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is glorified with the presence of the sons of her Order, and because Carmel is Mary's Order, and the sons of her Order will be giving honour and glory to the Immaculate Conception. Cardinal Wiseman will then give his speech, and, apart from saying that he had wanted for a long time to have the Carmelite Order in his diocese, he will also pick out these two points – the Eucharist and devotion to Mary – saying that they were two things that had got somewhat pushed aside in the English Church prior to the restoration – he's talking about the old English Church – and that he wants very much to promote those.

A question comes into my mind. What did Wiseman really want? Was it really the Carmelite Order he wanted or was it Hermann Cohen because of his huge capacity and reputation that fitted so well into the agenda that Wiseman had for the English Church? It's an interesting thought. Undoubtedly, from the very beginning, Wiseman had great ambitions for Hermann Cohen; he put him in charge of the formation of his clergy, got him to give retreats to his priests – and his English wasn't that good. The evidence is that at the beginning, certainly, he struggled with the English language and struggled to prepare sermons in English. But a few years later, when he's going back to France, the Prior of Kensington was to remark that Hermann was one of the few amongst them who could preach in English, so they really needed him here. His English may not have been that good but most of the others had even less English, and some of them had none.

The community then will struggle in many ways. They will struggle in particular to get people. Where are they going to get friars to make a community here? The options are very limited. Some Spanish friars will come – some will stay, some won't. Some French will, but there is reluctance on all their parts to come, the language being one of the reasons, the culture being another, but also the kind of life

that Hermann Cohen set up, the rigidity, all of which he had picked up in the novitiate. From the very beginning it had the reputation of a house that was not an easy one to live in. Hermann himself wasn't the easiest person to live with. We have no time to go into it, but there's interesting correspondence between him and the Assumption Sisters and their relationship with him, because they rented him the house and he was meant to pay rent for the house and of course there were disputes about the rent. He and the others were meant to be chaplains for the Sisters, and how much do the Assumption Sisters pay them for their service of chaplaincy. The Assumption sisters had agreed to provide them with vegetables from their garden, they weren't happy with the vegetables, they wanted different vegetables, they wanted the Sisters to do a whole lot of other things for them which the Sisters refused, so the whole relationship between them and the Assumption Sisters wasn't easy, and particularly when it came to dealing with money there's more than one letter that says, *It's because he's Jewish*. When it comes to money, that was the attitude towards Judaism at the time. They found him quite difficult and those who lived with him also.

They struggled to get friars from other countries to come and to get local vocations. Some young Englishmen joined but most left very quickly. As far as I can see, only one Englishman actually stayed, a man called Edward Badger, who lived until 1929, There as another Englishman, Edward Sharples, who entered the Order in France, was sent to England, stayed quite a few years but then went back to France and in fact died there some years later. There was an Irishman also who joined here, who went to Ireland and lived the rest of his life in Ireland. But apart from those three, in the early years I can't see anybody else who stayed, although a lot came. There are all kinds of reasons for that. One of them sums it up very well: *We have all the rigours of austerity to live but without any of the benefits*. What he meant by that I'm not sure, but I think there was an impoverishment in the spiritual formation, you had to abide by all the rules and the rituals, you had to live to a very high standard in all kinds of ways but because of obstacles with language and culture and everything else, they weren't really getting the spiritual nurturing that they needed to survive.

What begins in London is an enormous ministry, despite the difficulties of language and culture. From the beginning, Hermann Cohen himself in particular, but the others also, are preaching and going around the place and, of course, in the church itself there is ministry of the Blessed Sacrament and the Adoration and teaching catechism. It is a huge ministry from the very beginning. The community, as I said, was very international. The people kept changing, so it is very difficult to keep track, looking through documents, of who was here at a particular time. At one particular time there were five friars here from five different countries, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Malta. In a sense it was a microcosm of the Order, and today there are five of us here from four countries and three continents – two from Africa, two from Europe, and one from India. In a sense, both in 1863 and in 2021 the community represents the reality of the Carmelite Order. The Discalced Carmelite Order in those days was very much Western European, confined to a few countries; now it is worldwide, it is very international and much better established than it was then. At both times, the community at Kensington reflects the reality of the Order internationally. And it is interesting that that was one of the aims of Hermann Cohen when he came, and that it was the witness, he said, to the unity of the Church.

Hermann Cohen doesn't stay long in Kensington, he really only stays three years as Prior here. In that time an enormous amount is achieved. They set up the chapel in Kensington Square, as I said, but then that becomes too small. Various possibilities emerge. It looked at one stage as if they were going to set up in Stock in Essex, and at another time down in Kent was a possibility. But eventually they purchased the property where I am sitting here now, in what was Vicarage Gate in those days and is now Kensington Church Street. They purchased this property and they live in a house here and they set up a chapel. But again, that is too small, and so, towards the end of Hermann Cohen's time as Prior, they enter into a contract to build a new church here with Pugin as the architect, a massive church and, looking at the pictures of it, an ornate one. It would take until 1905 for the church to be completed, but within a year it's built, roofed and they're using it. In 1866, even though Hermann Cohen is now in France, he comes back here; he's still technically a member of the community here but he's no longer Prior. He comes back for the grand official opening, and grand it certainly was. And not only is the church built and open for use, though not all the artwork etc. is done, they also have the organ, from Cavaillé-Coll, the top organ makers in France. Needless to say, Hermann will have a proper organ installed and he brings the best organists, both from England and from France, for the occasion. There's no fewer than four organists, the most famous of them will be Jean Charles Widor; he's only twenty-one years of age at this stage but already has a great reputation, but the others also were the top organists in their time. Hermann himself, of course, would have written some of the music for the occasion. Cardinal Manning and other important people were there. It would have been a very spectacular occasion.

The house that I'm in here now won't be built until the 1880s, but it was an enormous achievement to have actually gone through three churches in four years and to have such an enormous work of architecture completed, with an organ put in. It's a massive achievement, though Hermann himself wasn't really the one who oversaw the building of the church, and his successor some years later will die, we're told, of exhaustion. Sometimes with these founders, with these charismatic figures, somebody else has to do the work. Hermann was the inspiration – *we have a beautiful church*, he said, *and a wonderful organ and an enormous amount of debts* – that's how Hermann summed up the situation after the opening of the church.

Something else I need to say that is important for our understanding of all of this. During this time another important event took place in the second church. They bring over from Bordeaux a relic of St Simon Stock. This was a huge event. Simon Stock was an English Carmelite back in the Middle Ages, associated very much with Mary and the scapular. It fits into a mentality that was very much behind what both Hermann Cohen was doing and what Wiseman and Manning were doing. It's restoration rather than founding: they're restoring a glorious past, that's how Wiseman and Manning saw their roles as leading the English church, and it's also very much how Hermann Cohen saw what his coming to England was about.

So, Simon Stock was very important, but there's an additional factor, there's almost something in the English Carmelite psyche that you could tack Simon Stock onto. The first Discalced Carmelite to come to England arrived in 1614, a man called Thomas Dockley and he took the name Simon Stock. From that time right up to Hermann Cohen's time there were several Discalced Carmelites in England. But if

you were English, you had to go to Flanders, study there, mostly in Louvain, and do all your formation there, because you weren't allowed under penal laws to have a religious community in England. They could come as individuals, sometimes they were tolerated and sometimes they weren't. Some of them would die as martyrs. It was the same for the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Benedictines – all of them. The last friar, a man called Francis Willoughby Brewster, died in 1849, thirteen years before Hermann Cohen comes. So, there was a short break with no Discalced Carmelite in England. Up to that, there was usually the occasional one to be found somewhere. A little story about Willoughby Brewster. At the time of Catholic emancipation there was research done on all the religious orders: What members do you have in England? How many? Who is the Superior? And so on. And he gave the famous reply, *No Superior, no inferior, being the last man left!* That was a wonderful statement to make. At almost exactly the same time that he died, Hermann Cohen was entering the Order in France, later to form a community in England.

Restoration it was, then. The bringing of the relic of Simon Stock was very important, and the ceremonies they had around this. Cardinal Wiseman was present; it was a big event with processions and dignitaries all around. This was bringing a relic from Bordeaux. (We have it downstairs still. It survived the complete destruction of the church in the Second World War, when the church was bombed and burnt, but actually the relic wasn't in the church, so it survived). It was an important moment both in the setting up of the Order, and in the mentality of Hermann Cohen and also in how Wiseman and Manning saw it – a work of restoration rather than of founding.

Hermann Cohen eventually, definitively returns to France in 1868, though from 1865 he was out of England more than being in England. There was actually quite a debate going on among the friars here in London as to whether they wanted him or not. The Prior and some others definitely do not. And they write to the General and say, *because his presence is disruptive when he's here, and he's hardly ever here, and he's so difficult to deal with, and he's more a hindrance than a help.* But there was another opinion, also correct, saying that *we need him, he's one of the few who can speak English, we need him for the money that he brings in, we need him for the context that he gives us, we need him because he's so well-known, without him we're bereft.* So, there are two sides to it. In 1868 he finally returns to France and eventually goes back to where he was, to the desert house at Tarasteix near Lourdes (I told you earlier the story about his eyesight deteriorating while he was there). The attraction to the desert life and retirement was very strong, but it doesn't last, of course. In 1870 there's a Chapter and he's elected Vicar Provincial. He was appointed novice master back in the novitiate where he had started off, but he never gets the chance to take up the role because the Franco-Prussian war has broken out and he couldn't stay, and so he goes towards his death.

From the age of four he begins seriously playing the piano. By the age of seven he gives his first concert. So, this is a child prodigy and music is going to dominate the life of this great pianist, organist, composer: music is what's going to make Hermann famous throughout Europe. From the age of four, music pretty much dominates the life of this young boy. So much so, that any formal education that he might have had ends more or less when he is ten, and there's little evidence that he got much up until then – music was everything. In 1832 his mother decides to take him to Paris where he could get a much better professional training in music and he succeeds in getting sponsorship. (Even though the family were quite wealthy, they were actually on the verge of bankruptcy at this stage, with the businesses failing). The difficulty when he arrived in Paris was that, not being a French citizen, the Paris Conservatoire would not accept him. The father had refused to come to Paris, and his mother was on her own there, having poured everything into her son — and they wouldn't accept him. But she persuades Franz Liszt to take him on. This was much against his initial reaction, but when Liszt heard the young Hermann play for the first time, he realised that there was something special there. So, Liszt takes him on as a student. This goes fine for a little while, until Liszt falls in love and decides to move to Geneva, and he refuses to take Hermann with him. However, Hermann is so determined that he goes anyway. He arrives in Geneva and, despite objections from Liszt's new partner, who's very jealous of Hermann and doesn't want him around the place, Liszt takes him back. (In the relationship of Hermann and Liszt they're very close companions, they travel everywhere together and then they completely fall out and then they're reconciled again. This pattern seems to repeat itself over and over again).

At the age of fifteen Hermann becomes a Professor of Music at the Conservatoire in Geneva, which has just been founded, and is taking on his own students. This man is a very, very gifted musician, composing, playing, teaching. In 1841 he finally breaks with Liszt (although he will appear in his life again). By now they have travelled all over Europe together and Hermann is known everywhere. He moves back to Paris, which is a sort of base over these years, although he moves around all over the place. He finally falls in love with a lady called Celeste Mogador; it doesn't last long, but it is the one serious love relationship of his life. It doesn't last long because conversion is there somewhere in the background and, not long after he breaks up with her, he will convert to Christianity.

One thing that is important for our understanding of Hermann and his mentality, his psychology, is that he becomes addicted to gambling and that is an enormous issue: not just the gambling, but the addiction. We could say he is an addictive personality. Of course, the gambling gets him into all kinds of trouble and he runs up enormous debts and that becomes a major issue for him. At one stage it almost gets to the point of destroying his music – he is not rehearsing, he is not putting the effort into his music, he is so engrossed in gambling. This addictive personality is going to show itself over and over again, though he finally breaks with gambling and it appears that he paid off most of his debts. Just before becoming a Christian he puts on a special concert to try and pay off some of his debts, so we think he paid off a lot of them but probably not all.



What changes? 1847 is really the year when things change and he would make it very clear to us that the change was the work of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Eucharist. There are two incidents in particular, in both of which he is playing the organ during Benediction. First of all in the church of St Valery in Paris and a few months later in Ems in Germany – very similar spiritual experiences during Benediction when he was playing the organ, which were to set the theme of his life. I'll read an extract here from one of his sermons in which he describes this for us. It helps us to see how he understood his conversion.

*Mary obtained for me from the God of the Eucharist a cure infinitely more important to me than that of my bodily eyes – that is, freedom from my blindness. It was the month of Mary and they were singing hymns. Mary the mother of Jesus revealed the Eucharist to me. I knew Jesus, I knew God. Soon I became a Christian. I asked for baptism and before long the holy water was flowing over me. At that moment, all the many sins of my twenty-five years were wiped out. Brethren, God pardoned me, Mary pardoned me. Will you not pardon me too?*

That just gives us a sense of what his conversion was about, what it meant to him. If we were to ask the question, what is the spirituality of Hermann Cohen, two things stand out – his devotion to Mary and his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist – and the connection between them. It is Mary who brought him to the Eucharist: the Eucharist would become his mission. He is described as the *Missionary of the Eucharist* for Europe for the nineteenth century. He begins this mission right after baptism. On 28 August 1847 he is baptised, and his First Communion takes place on 8 September of the same year, and later his Confirmation on 3 December. And he throws himself into Christian life and particularly into promoting devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, organising Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Night Adoration, all of this, which he will become famous for all over Europe. That begins straight away as his mission.

In the following year, history intervenes – 1848 is the year of revolution in France and the beginning of what's known as the French Second Republic. Hermann participates a little bit in this but his mind is going in other ways and it is going toward the priesthood and towards religious life. It appears that the first place he tried was the Benedictines, and one would think it was a natural fit for him, and they turn him down. He then consulted with a Dominican. It's not clear whether the Dominicans actually turned him down or whether it's simply that the Dominican priest he consulted advised that the Dominicans were not the right place for him – either way, Carmel is his choice. He enters Carmel in 1849 and begins his novitiate on 19 July 1849.

I will now pick up another story. To understand what Hermann is coming into, we've got to understand something about the Discalced Carmelite Order in those times. When Hermann joined the Discalced Carmelites, they were not one order as we are today. The Discalced Carmelite friars only became one religious order in 1875, which

is four years after Hermann Cohen's death. In 1593, two years after St John of the Cross' death, the sons of St Teresa and St John of the Cross split into two. They split into what would become the Spanish congregation and the Italian congregation. So, there are two separate congregations with separate constitutions, separate leadership and, perhaps what is most critical, two different understandings of what it meant to be sons of St Teresa, two different interpretations of the Teresian charism. That will carry on, and then there will be the further complication of a third, Portuguese congregation, but let's leave that on one side.

In 1835 that radically changes, because the Order is effectively wiped out in Spain by the political situation; only one house actually survived. All religious communities of men were driven out of Spain. (Not of women: the women were more or less left alone.) That effectively destroyed the Spanish congregation. The only places where the Spanish friars had communities were Spain and Mexico, and although the Mexicans continued, they were quite often going their own ways and they weren't in the healthiest of states anyway. The Italian congregation, on the other hand, was present in Italy, France and Germany, along with a few missions in various places, particularly in the Arab world and in India, where they had a small presence. Again, in most of these countries at various times the Order was suppressed. There is almost a pattern of flourishing and then the political situation changing everything. In France, for example, they were wiped out at the French revolution. Italy had really only got going again by the 1830s but by Hermann Cohen's time the Order is doing pretty well in Italy. Germany is a very small presence. Belgium, Flanders, yes, they're doing OK there, but beyond that – that's the limit of the Order. So, by the 1840s there is no presence of the Discalced Carmelite friars in France, no community. But there are a lot of individual friars who crossed the Pyrenees, such as Francisco Palau.

I want now to pick up the story of one man, Père Dominique, a highly qualified friar who had taught in Burgos and other college of the order in Spain and in 1839 he crosses the Pyrenees into France and goes to Bordeaux. His plan is to go to Mexico. A lot of the friars either left the religious life, left the priesthood, or became diocesan priests or drifted off in other directions: and Père Dominique wanted to stay in the Order, and the only place he felt he could go was Mexico and his plan was to go to Bordeaux to try and get on a ship and go there. However, the Prioress of the Carmelite Convent in Bordeaux has other ideas. She wants to restart the Carmelite friars in France and now the ideal candidate turns up. They don't exactly get on immediately, but they come to an agreement eventually. And in 1841 Père Dominique begins the first house for friars, and it's Spanish. He brings together some Spanish friars and starts taking in French vocations. The order rapidly grows, so much so that later on, by 1867, they will have two Provinces in France. Of course, Père Dominique was a member of the Spanish congregation, not of the Italian congregation. Although the Spanish congregation was wiped out in 1835, it still has a Procurator General in Rome in charge of relations with the Holy See and representing the Order there, and so Père Dominique goes to him and asks for his support for the foundation and the answer is, *Absolutely no*. And we might ask, what's going on, what's in the

mentality? Surely, since they've lost all these houses, and here's someone who wants to start it up again, surely he'll support him? But there's a mentality deep within the psyche of the Spanish Carmelites that the Teresian reform is culturally Spanish and it can really only be started off in Spain. That's why they didn't set up any missions outside – except Mexico, and they didn't even allow the Mexicans to expand into other parts of Latin America or North America.

So, that's the scenario. Père Dominique is a very influential person and is going to set the Order up and it's into this that Hermann Cohen comes. Why does Hermann Cohen choose the Carmelites? It's difficult to know. I want to quote a little bit from a letter he wrote to his mother and his family, explaining to them why he chose the Carmelites. It gives us a sense of what's going through his mind: *I have chosen a life of solitude, silence, retirement, a hidden life and unknown, a life of self-denial.* That's a great sentence. Of course, when we look at the life that Hermann Cohen lived, he's all over the place, he's travelling the whole of Europe. It's not solitude, it is not a hidden life, but at the same time there's a pull toward solitude and silence in him, very definitely, and not only that, but the emphasis he puts upon self-denial, that's going to be strong in his life and in this we can see the addictive personality re-emerging. Hermann goes to excess in all sorts of different ways and it's typical of him to choose the order that he sees as having greatest self-denial, the greatest of penances. There's an attraction towards excess, it's part of his addictive tendencies. He goes on then, *In short, I find myself in the novitiate of a religious order celebrated in history for its austerities, its penances and its love of God.* Surely we would put the love of God first? He puts it third. Now he goes to the other thing that draws him, or at least how he justifies it to his family – *this order had its beginning among the Jews 930 years before the birth of Christ and was founded by the Prophet Elias on Mount Carmel in Palestine.* That was how the history of the Order was understood at that time; nobody would have questioned the historical accuracy at that time, historical research came decades later, and for his Jewish family that's his emphasis. *It is an order of true Israelites of the children of the prophets who looked for the Messiah, who believed in him when he came and who have perpetuated their order to our own day, always living in the same manner, with the same bodily privations and the same joy of heart as they lived on Mount Carmel 2,800 years ago.*

That gives us a sense of Hermann's motivation and how he sees the Order, how he presents it. It also shows us Hermann as a person of his time, both in the Carmelites' understanding of what it meant to be a Carmelite and in the theology of the time. It is something that will be a source of great pain to him and to other Jews. There is a lovely sermon he gives, *The profession of a fellow Jew*, in which he speaks about his mother and the love for a mother, but if they do not become Christian, they are not saved, outside of the Church there is no salvation. Hermann takes that very much to heart and strongly believes it and preaches it, because that was the understanding of the time. And he is very much a person of his time, although he keeps a good relationship with his family and some of his family did become Christian, though his mother or father did not. Hermann doesn't mention in that letter what were obviously the two strongest motives: Mary – and he would have seen Carmel as Mary's Order;

and the importance of the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist, and St Teresa's love for the Eucharist and all of this which he speaks about elsewhere.

So, he enters the novitiate at Le Broussay just outside Bordeaux, which at that time would have been very austere. It has also been described, and rightly so, as very Spanish, because the novice master spoke very little French. It was very Spanish in mentality, in outlook. The divide in the Order was not just a juridical divide but a cultural divide between the Italian and Spanish congregations. But novices are coming, and very quickly, and there is rapid growth. It would have been austere and very difficult. Despite Hermann's strong enthusiasm and desiring this, and his addictive personality and the enthusiasm of a recent convert and his sense of mission that this is for the Eucharist, he would have found it difficult. The Prior of that community, writing some years later and reflecting back on Hermann Cohen's experience in the novitiate, makes an interesting comment. He says that, above all else, there were three deprivations that really affected Hermann. One was that he had to give up smoking; he had to give up taking snuff; and he had to give up coffee. The Prior's comment was that they hadn't understood at the time the effect these three deprivations would have on Hermann's health. His health was suffering, and he had to go back on all three later – in a small way, the Prior says. The addiction again comes to the fore in all kinds of different ways.

Having said all that, there's also evidence that Hermann was no normal novice. Firstly, he is a very famous man musically, he's a celebrity all over Europe, so his conversion and entering the Order were well known. But secondly, he has already established a ministry for himself in the Church, promoting devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, before he entered. In the Novitiate in those days you were given no choice of what room, what cell you got, you were told where to go. Hermann was allowed, we are told, to choose the cell nearest to the chapel so that he would live nearest to the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament. He was given that choice. Secondly, he was allowed to continue his ministry. He wasn't allowed to travel around, but he was in correspondence all the time with leaders of the nocturnal devotion that he had started all over the place. This would have been unheard of in the normal Carmelite novitiate of the time. So, there is a recognition that this novice is special.

He makes his profession 7 October 1850, and then it was one profession, there was no temporary and final profession, this was his profession for life. Just six months later, he's ordained a priest, 19 April 1851. Now, we have to ask, did he do any studies for the priesthood? I can find no record of his doing any studies for the priesthood. As I've said, he has no education beyond ten years of age, if he had much before then, so he's really a man with no formal education and no formal studies for the priesthood – there doesn't seem to have been any, or very little, even in that six month period from October to April when he's meant to be doing studies. His ordination was meant to be in June at the feast of Pentecost, but the bishop wasn't going to be there so it was moved forward to Holy Saturday, which is a very unusual day for an ordination. Easter Sunday would make sense, but not Holy Saturday – it was all to do with the availability of the bishop. So, there was a rush to get this man ordained. But during

those six months Père Dominique, who was very influential on Hermann, had already starting taking Hermann around with him on his travels, founding houses and ministries. But also, he asked Hermann to do some composing. A Sister had written some canticles and he wanted Hermann to put them to music and he put pressure on Hermann to get them finished fast. There seem to have been two reasons for this. During the novitiate Hermann was not allowed to compose and Dominique did recognise that this was a major loss, and that a musician needed to play music and compose, so getting him composing again was important for his psychological well-being. But secondly, he saw the usefulness of Hermann for the work he was doing in founding houses. There was money to be made here. Hermann was making money out of his music and he had the capacity to raise funds which they so badly needed. Dominique was a practical man as well, and wanted the help of Hermann, who becomes effectively his assistant in founding the Order in France, building up the discalced friars in house after house. So, he's ordained, and that's a very important event: priesthood is very important for him.

When Hermann entered the Order, he was given the name Augustine Maria of the Blessed Sacrament, and that was common in those days, and often he is known as Père Augustin, but most people right throughout his life still referred to him as Hermann. A few years ago, here in Kensington, our then organist, Bruce Ogston, who used to play Hermann's music a lot, asked me why all the music that Hermann composed, both before he entered the Order and afterwards, is all put down as 'Hermann,' he never used his surname, which is very unusual for composers. Some people suggest it's because he was Jewish – that's unlikely. He never hid the fact that he was Jewish, and he used his surname Cohen all the time: he was known as Hermann Cohen the musician. So, we don't know the reason, but Hermann was what was always put on his music.

I will mention now the involvement of Hermann Cohen with Lourdes. In 1858 Our Lady appeared to Bernadette at Lourdes. Hermann is at this time very near there, having founded a desert house of the Carmelite Order at Tarasteix nearby. He meets with Bernadette 21 September 1858. She's reluctant to meet him, as she has been given a very poor reception by some priests and by some civic leaders, but Hermann supports her, completely supports her. Not only that, but he has three distinctions when it comes to Lourdes. One is that he led the first pilgrimage to Lourdes, even though there were barricades to stop people approaching the grotto and, because Hermann Cohen was leading, it a huge crowd turned up, as they would wherever he went. He gave an important speech there and led the prayers and Benediction and blessed himself with the water etc. That's not actually recorded in some of the histories of Lourdes, because it was before any permission had been given to have pilgrimages to Lourdes, but it definitely happened. Secondly, he has the distinction of composing music for the first hymn specifically written for Lourdes, and thirdly he paid for the first banner or flag that was made for pilgrims going to Lourdes.

But that's not the end of the story. About ten years later he's back again in the desert house at Tarasteix and his eyesight is failing badly. He goes to the top specialist in

France at the time, who said, there's very little can be done, we could do surgery but that might leave you totally blind – basically he was going blind. He began a novena to Our Lady of Lourdes and in the last days of the novena he went to Lourdes and bathed himself in the water and all of that; and each day, he tells us, during the novena, his eyesight improved and by the end it was perfect, and for the rest of his life he never had a problem with his eyesight. The specialist could not explain it in any way: it was just a miracle. Think back to the piece that I read earlier on, when we were speaking about his conversion, written so many years before about Our Lady taking away his blindness, opening his eyes to the light – and later she would physically do that for him, that miracle. So, his connection with Lourdes is an important one and he will be an important supporter and promoter of Lourdes. Having such a big figure support Bernadette and Lourdes at the very beginning was very significant.

How does he end up in Kensington? We come to 1862 and he's in Rome. It's not Hermann's first visit to Rome. He had been to Rome as a musician. He'd also been to Rome because when they were arranging his entry into the Order, they discovered that there was a canonical problem: they couldn't accept a Jewish convert so early after Baptism, and he appealed to Rome, to the General of the Order, and the answer was, *No*. So, he decides to go and speak himself with the Pope. He gets to Rome to discover that, because of the political situation, the Pope isn't in Rome, he's in Gaeta, in fact he was actually in Naples at the time. But the General Definitory of the Order were actually meeting in Rome at the time, and maybe it was his presence or whatever he said to them, but they changed their minds and they agreed, so he didn't have to go to the Pope.

But now, 1862, he's back in Rome again. The reason for this visit is the canonisation of martyrs in Japan. Now there's other reasons as well why he's there, other business he has there, but also in Rome is Cardinal Wiseman, who is the first Archbishop of Westminster after the restoration of the hierarchy in England. One of the policies of Wiseman is to bring religious orders to England, which he's very anxious to do, and he meets with Hermann Cohen and asks Hermann to come to England and to set up a community of Carmelite friars in London. And that's fine, they go to the General of the Carmelite Order and he says, *No*. So, they have to go to the Pope, and this time he does meet the Pope, Pius IX, who overrules the Carmelites and gives Hermann permission to go to England. I mentioned that Hermann was given the name Augustine and, of course, the Pope said, *Oh, I'm sending another Augustine to England. Like Pope Gregory sent Augustine of Canterbury all those centuries earlier, I am sending you for the conversion of England.* (Of course, it was actually Augustine of Hippo he was called after). Something else, incidentally that happened in Rome on that visit was that Franz Liszt was also in Rome at the time and there was a final reconciliation between them. As I said before, there were fallings out and reconciliations over the course of a lifetime but this was the final reconciliation. Liszt is now a Franciscan tertiary and a cleric – he's not a deacon or a priest, but he has received the minor orders and is called Reverend Liszt. So, he's gone through a

conversion experience himself, there's a reconciliation between the two of them, and they're friends from then on.

Being sent to England constituted an enormous change in Hermann's life. To give a sense of the change, I want to read from a letter that he wrote to his brother Albert on 17 August 1862, shortly after arriving in England: *I have to admit that to me it's a real sacrifice to leave France, where my role as a priest and religious gave me so much consolation. Here I cannot even leave the house without changing out of my Carmelite habit and dressing in a black coat, stiff white collar and a black scarf and this wretched collar imprisons my neck, my head, my thoughts and my heart. I'm only half alive, but no matter, since religious life is one of sacrifice, why not take a few more steps forward when it's a question of helping so many Catholics of all nations who are scattered throughout this huge city of London and, as far as any religious assistance is concerned, abandoned almost entirely to themselves.* That's his first impressions of London. He's finding it very difficult, and one of the difficulties is the language. He has some English and he has been to London before. He was there as a musician, when he was well-known, had quite a reputation and quite a lot of contacts, so he was familiar with London, but a very different London to the religious one. He's now back as a priest, but having to leave behind the life he had in France, the success and the reputation he had there, and really struggle in a very alien environment.

He comes here to Kensington, to Kensington Square. The Sisters of the Assumption have been there for some years now, and they give him a house, No. 24 Kensington Square, and that would become the first Carmelite Priory. On 15 October of that year was the official opening. Present of course at the opening were Wiseman and Manning. Cardinal Wiseman will die in 1863, the following year, and Manning will take over. These two most important figures in the restoration of the hierarchy of the English church are both present, as is William Faber, who founds the Oratory, and many others. It's a big event – even though the house is very small, the chapel is very small. I want to quote from Hermann Cohen's speech, and we're told it was very long, in French, but here's a little quote. *The reason for the foundation of the Carmelites in England is to counteract the three principal errors of Protestantism: the denial of the unity of the Catholic Church, the denial of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the denial of the Immaculate Conception.* (1854 the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was defined by the Catholic Church so those three were what he picks out as the principal errors of Protestantism). And, he goes on to say, *To counteract those, this new foundation is going to demonstrate eloquently the unity of the Catholic Church by the presence of priests from many different backgrounds and cultures and they will integrate well with the local clergy.* That's an interesting point to put there. Two years later he will be in Belgium for a conference on European Catholicism and he will give a famous speech there on the state of the Catholic Church in England. One of the things he will say in that speech is that in England, the religious clergy – that is, priests who are members of religious orders – and the diocesan clergy have a very good relationship, not like, he says, in other countries. The Archbishop of Paris who was there was very angry and took grave exception to

Hermann Cohen's speech and particularly to that comment, because he interpreted it as a jibe to France.

It's interesting that the first motive for the Carmelites coming to London was the unity of the Church, and it will be manifested particularly by the composition of the community of friars in Kensington and the very good relationship between them and the local clergy. The second – the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist – will be given honour with the benediction, blessing of this new tabernacle and will be venerated and adored. And, of course, he will begin Eucharistic Adoration in London from the time he arrives, and it will be one of his great legacies to the English Church. And thirdly, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is glorified with the presence of the sons of her Order, and because Carmel is Mary's Order, and the sons of her Order will be giving honour and glory to the Immaculate Conception. Cardinal Wiseman will then give his speech, and, apart from saying that he had wanted for a long time to have the Carmelite Order in his diocese, he will also pick out these two points – the Eucharist and devotion to Mary – saying that they were two things that had got somewhat pushed aside in the English Church prior to the restoration – he's talking about the old English Church – and that he wants very much to promote those.

A question comes into my mind. What did Wiseman really want? Was it really the Carmelite Order he wanted or was it Hermann Cohen because of his huge capacity and reputation that fitted so well into the agenda that Wiseman had for the English Church? It's an interesting thought. Undoubtedly, from the very beginning, Wiseman had great ambitions for Hermann Cohen; he put him in charge of the formation of his clergy, got him to give retreats to his priests – and his English wasn't that good. The evidence is that at the beginning, certainly, he struggled with the English language and struggled to prepare sermons in English. But a few years later, when he's going back to France, the Prior of Kensington was to remark that Hermann was one of the few amongst them who could preach in English, so they really needed him here. His English may not have been that good but most of the others had even less English, and some of them had none.

The community then will struggle in many ways. They will struggle in particular to get people. Where are they going to get friars to make a community here? The options are very limited. Some Spanish friars will come – some will stay, some won't. Some French will, but there is reluctance on all their parts to come, the language being one of the reasons, the culture being another, but also the kind of life that Hermann Cohen set up, the rigidity, all of which he had picked up in the novitiate. From the very beginning it had the reputation of a house that was not an easy one to live in. Hermann himself wasn't the easiest person to live with. We have no time to go into it, but there's interesting correspondence between him and the Assumption Sisters and their relationship with him, because they rented him the house and he was meant to pay rent for the house and of course there were disputes about the rent. He and the others were meant to be chaplains for the Sisters, and how much do the Assumption Sisters pay them for their service of chaplaincy. The Assumption



sisters had agreed to provide them with vegetables from their garden, they weren't happy with the vegetables, they wanted different vegetables, they wanted the Sisters to do a whole lot of other things for them which the Sisters refused, so the whole relationship between them and the Assumption Sisters wasn't easy, and particularly when it came to dealing with money there's more than one letter that says, *It's because he's Jewish*. When it comes to money, that was the attitude towards Judaism at the time. They found him quite difficult and those who lived with him also.

They struggled to get friars from other countries to come and to get local vocations. Some young Englishmen joined but most left very quickly. As far as I can see, only one Englishman actually stayed, a man called Edward Badger, who lived until 1929, There as another Englishman, Edward Sharples, who entered the Order in France, was sent to England, stayed quite a few years but then went back to France and in fact died there some years later. There was an Irishman also who joined here, who went to Ireland and lived the rest of his life in Ireland. But apart from those three, in the early years I can't see anybody else who stayed, although a lot came. There are all kinds of reasons for that. One of them sums it up very well: *We have all the rigours of austerity to live but without any of the benefits*. What he meant by that I'm not sure, but I think there was an impoverishment in the spiritual formation, you had to abide by all the rules and the rituals, you had to live to a very high standard in all kinds of ways but because of obstacles with language and culture and everything else, they weren't really getting the spiritual nurturing that they needed to survive.

What begins in London is an enormous ministry, despite the difficulties of language and culture. From the beginning, Hermann Cohen himself in particular, but the others also, are preaching and going around the place and, of course, in the church itself there is ministry of the Blessed Sacrament and the Adoration and teaching catechism. It is a huge ministry from the very beginning. The community, as I said, was very international. The people kept changing, so it is very difficult to keep track, looking through documents, of who was here at a particular time. At one particular time there were five friars here from five different countries, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Malta. In a sense it was a microcosm of the Order, and today there are five of us here from four countries and three continents – two from Africa, two from Europe, and one from India. In a sense, both in 1863 and in 2021 the community represents the reality of the Carmelite Order. The Discalced Carmelite Order in those days was very much Western European, confined to a few countries; now it is worldwide, it is very international and much better established than it was then. At both times, the community at Kensington reflects the reality of the Order internationally. And it is interesting that that was one of the aims of Hermann Cohen when he came, and that it was the witness, he said, to the unity of the Church.

Hermann Cohen doesn't stay long in Kensington, he really only stays three years as Prior here. In that time an enormous amount is achieved. They set up the chapel in Kensington Square, as I said, but then that becomes too small. Various possibilities emerge. It looked at one stage as if they were going to set up in Stock in Essex, and at another time down in Kent was a possibility. But eventually they purchased the

property where I am sitting here now, in what was Vicarage Gate in those days and is now Kensington Church Street. They purchased this property and they live in a house here and they set up a chapel. But again, that is too small, and so, towards the end of Hermann Cohen's time as Prior, they enter into a contract to build a new church here with Pugin as the architect, a massive church and, looking at the pictures of it, an ornate one. It would take until 1905 for the church to be completed, but within a year it's built, roofed and they're using it. In 1866, even though Hermann Cohen is now in France, he comes back here; he's still technically a member of the community here but he's no longer Prior. He comes back for the grand official opening, and grand it certainly was. And not only is the church built and open for use, though not all the artwork etc. is done, they also have the organ, from Cavaillé-Coll, the top organ makers in France. Needless to say, Hermann will have a proper organ installed and he brings the best organists, both from England and from France, for the occasion. There's no fewer than four organists, the most famous of them will be Jean Charles Widor; he's only twenty-one years of age at this stage but already has a great reputation, but the others also were the top organists in their time. Hermann himself, of course, would have written some of the music for the occasion. Cardinal Manning and other important people were there. It would have been a very spectacular occasion.

The house that I'm in here now won't be built until the 1880s, but it was an enormous achievement to have actually gone through three churches in four years and to have such an enormous work of architecture completed, with an organ put in. It's a massive achievement, though Hermann himself wasn't really the one who oversaw the building of the church, and his successor some years later will die, we're told, of exhaustion. Sometimes with these founders, with these charismatic figures, somebody else has to do the work. Hermann was the inspiration – *we have a beautiful church*, he said, *and a wonderful organ and an enormous amount of debts* – that's how Hermann summed up the situation after the opening of the church.

Something else I need to say that is important for our understanding of all of this. During this time another important event took place in the second church. They bring over from Bordeaux a relic of St Simon Stock. This was a huge event. Simon Stock was an English Carmelite back in the Middle Ages, associated very much with Mary and the scapular. It fits into a mentality that was very much behind what both Hermann Cohen was doing and what Wiseman and Manning were doing. It's restoration rather than founding: they're restoring a glorious past, that's how Wiseman and Manning saw their roles as leading the English church, and it's also very much how Hermann Cohen saw what his coming to England was about.

So, Simon Stock was very important, but there's an additional factor, there's almost something in the English Carmelite psyche that you could tack Simon Stock onto. The first Discalced Carmelite to come to England arrived in 1614, a man called Thomas Dockley and he took the name Simon Stock. From that time right up to Hermann Cohen's time there were several Discalced Carmelites in England. But if you were English, you had to go to Flanders, study there, mostly in Louvain, and do

all your formation there, because you weren't allowed under penal laws to have a religious community in England. They could come as individuals, sometimes they were tolerated and sometimes they weren't. Some of them would die as martyrs. It was the same for the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Benedictines – all of them. The last friar, a man called Francis Willoughby Brewster, died in 1849, thirteen years before Hermann Cohen comes. So, there was a short break with no Discalced Carmelite in England. Up to that, there was usually the occasional one to be found somewhere. A little story about Willoughby Brewster. At the time of Catholic emancipation there was research done on all the religious orders: What members do you have in England? How many? Who is the Superior? And so on. And he gave the famous reply, *No Superior, no inferior, being the last man left!* That was a wonderful statement to make. At almost exactly the same time that he died, Hermann Cohen was entering the Order in France, later to form a community in England.

Restoration it was, then. The bringing of the relic of Simon Stock was very important, and the ceremonies they had around this. Cardinal Wiseman was present; it was a big event with processions and dignitaries all around. This was bringing a relic from Bordeaux. (We have it downstairs still. It survived the complete destruction of the church in the Second World War, when the church was bombed and burnt, but actually the relic wasn't in the church, so it survived). It was an important moment both in the setting up of the Order, and in the mentality of Hermann Cohen and also in how Wiseman and Manning saw it – a work of restoration rather than of founding.

Hermann Cohen eventually, definitively returns to France in 1868, though from 1865 he was out of England more than being in England. There was actually quite a debate going on among the friars here in London as to whether they wanted him or not. The Prior and some others definitely do not. And they write to the General and say, *because his presence is disruptive when he's here, and he's hardly ever here, and he's so difficult to deal with, and he's more a hindrance than a help.* But there was another opinion, also correct, saying that *we need him, he's one of the few who can speak English, we need him for the money that he brings in, we need him for the context that he gives us, we need him because he's so well-known, without him we're bereft.* So, there are two sides to it. In 1868 he finally returns to France and eventually goes back to where he was, to the desert house at Tarasteix near Lourdes (I told you earlier the story about his eyesight deteriorating while he was there). The attraction to the desert life and retirement was very strong, but it doesn't last, of course. In 1870 there's a Chapter and he's elected Vicar Provincial. He was appointed novice master back in the novitiate where he had started off, but he never gets the chance to take up the role because the Franco-Prussian war has broken out and he couldn't stay, and so he goes towards his death.