

Chapter Nine.

Carmelite Apostolate

Quite soon after his ordination Hermann Cohen was being entrusted with a busy apostolate of travelling and preaching. Indeed he sometimes jokingly referred to himself as 'the wandering Jew.' When someone asked him where he lived he replied: 'In a railway carriage!' By temperament however he would have much preferred the more retired form of Carmelite life. He preached in nearly all the towns of southern France, and his preaching always made an impact. There are several references to such visits in the newspapers of the time. At Lyons for instance on one occasion he had a congregation of 3,000 people. It was an occasion to raise money for the poor of Lyons. He also preached in towns like Beziers, Montpellier and Avignon and invariably a movement for the practice of Nocturnal Adoration followed.

It was planned that Hermann should preach during May in Geneva, and though he looked forward to preaching the gospel in a place where he had lived as a concert pianist, he was forced to cancel this engagement. His health, never robust, had given increasing cause for concern. On his way back to Carcassonne he met the shepherd boy of la Salette at Grenoble. Hermann showed interest in these places which gave rise to Marian devotion, as he would later take an interest in Lourdes also, and indeed he would become one of the first people to be physically healed there as we shall see. Hermann spent the next couple of months recuperating from nervous exhaustion. In a letter to an unknown friend Hermann admitted that he was going through a difficult time, but he maintained that he wished to suffer for the Lord. Up to now he felt he had been given a lot of consolation, - 'life on Thabor', but he had not been given the chalice of suffering to drink. As well as exhaustion Hermann suffered from a painful condition of the leg. His surroundings at Hyeres were very beautiful and he describes the countryside in these words:

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"I am in a kind of fairyland here. Just think of the climate at Hyeres, that of a garden on the edge of the sea, a lovely valley sheltered from the northern winds by a semi-circular range of mountains with olive, orange, parasol pine and charming almond trees. Two great palm trees grow near the remote house where I live. It's like being in the far east! The sea lies in the distance at the end of the valley, blue like the sky and out there you can see some islands. And here in this lovely place, not far from my bed there is a chapel where the blessed sacrament is reserved."

It is interesting to know that while he was here he met Fr. Julien Eymard (later canonised), who was also convalescing in the area. In the course of a walk together, Fr. Eymard told Hermann of his plan to devote himself to the work of Perpetual Adoration and to found an order dedicated to the adoration of the blessed sacrament. They decided they would both work together for the same purpose. Later however Fr. Eymard diverged in his views from Hermann and his friends and it centred on the idea of reparation. Eymard felt that this was a limitation on his own vision of a eucharistic apostolate. There was a further difference between Julien and Hermann on the matter of mixed congregations for night adoration which Hermann

objected to. It is of interest too in trying to put a picture of Hermann's character together that Julien Eymard found him intolerant on this point and was very hurt by his opposition. However Hermann tried to be reconciled with him but without success! As it happened, the three different eucharistic movements, namely Nocturnal Adoration, the Adoration of the Reparatrice movement and Julien Eymard's Religious of the Blessed Sacrament, all ended up independently of one another. The Reparatrice movement met at the chapel of the Carmelite sisters in Paris. Indeed Cardinal Berulle wished to establish perpetual adoration among the Carmels in France but Barbara Acarie was against this suggestion.(1)

Around this time Hermann went to preach at Bordeaux. It was actually his birthday November 10th. and the scene was a distinguished gathering in the

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presence of the Cardinal Archbishop. He went from there to Tours which was also a successful gathering, and from there he made his way to Marseille. At that time the Bishop of Marseille was Monsignor de Mazenod, famous as the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who was beatified by Pope Paul VI. De Mazenod who was very devoted to the eucharist, gave him a great welcome and became a firm friend. The congregation was immense and there was a great atmosphere in the cathedral. Hermann certainly made a lasting impression on the Bishop who prevailed on him to remain a few days.

At Easter we find Hermann back in Paris preaching in the church of St. Sulpice.

In October 1856 Hermann was still engaged in this travelling apostolate, but at the request of his sister he went back to Paris to baptise secretly his nephew George in the church of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. George's perseverance in wanting to become a Catholic was remarkable in a boy so young. Soon afterwards his father discovered what had happened when the boy refused to join him in a Jewish prayer and admitted that he was a Christian. His father then took the boy and put him in a non-Catholic boarding school in Germany under a false name. He refused to divulge where he had put him. When George asked to see his mother he was told that he could see her on condition that he renounced his faith. This he refused to do. His mother prevailed on her husband to take her to see her son but they were forbidden to mention religion. A few months later George's father admitted defeat and the boy was recalled home! Soon afterwards Hermann's elder brother Albert became a Catholic. He remarked that a faith which gave such strength to a child must be from God. Two of Albert's daughters later became nuns.

It is worth mentioning other contacts made by Fr. Hermann which were to have significance for the Order of Carmel.

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It happened that towards the end of his life in 1870, Hermann was visiting a friend in Paris, Princess Ampora who was the daughter of the exiled Queen Marie-Christine of Spain and she lived near some Polish emigres. Among these were Marie Czartosyska, a princess. Later Joseph Kalinowski became tutor to the queen's children. He was beatified by Pope John Paul in 1985 and is now known as Blessed Raphael. Hermann Cohen was the first Carmelite Marie Czartosyska had met, and she was very impressed by him. She later joined the Carmelite sisters in Paris. From there she was transferred back to her native Poland to the Carmel at Cracow. Her influence was also a factor in Joseph Kalinowski becoming a Carmelite. He was chiefly responsible for renewing the Carmelite foundation in Galicia in Poland. Blessed Raphael's work led to a new growth of the Carmelite Order in Poland in 1918. For this we can perhaps indirectly thank the influence of Fr. Hermann .

(1). The career of Barbara Acarie was a remarkable one. She was instrumental in bringing the Carmelite nuns to France. She was born in 1566 and married Pierre Acarie in 1582, the year of St. Teresa's death. They had five children. In 1601 she was inspired by St. Teresa to establish the Carmelite nuns in France. After her husband's death she entered the Carmel herself and is now known as Blessed Marie of the Incarnation.