March 19, 1950

 Dear fellow countrymen and countrywomen, I greet you with the words: Praised is Jesus Christ.

At the time of many and frequent train journeys, whether I liked it or not, I have met people of varied character, various political and religious persuasions. It seems that I was born under an unlucky star, since on every journey, some individual engages me in conversation. Usually the discussion begins with the weather and generally ends up with religion. And even though I have tried to avoid arguing religion, I am though I am compelled to listen to what the person has to say or ask, comment on difficulties, keep away from one sided views, avoid controversy or impatience. Most people are interested in religion or related topics. It is a healthy sign and a joyous thing that in this feverish and crazy tempo of living people would be interested in religion. Although these conversations born in railroad cars has have seldom great depth but in more times than not, they revolve around moral issues, daily events, and generally they touch on the topic of marriage. In November of last year I was travelling to New York, to attend to some business involving the Rosary Hour. I sat peacefully in the “smoker” reading the morning paper and smoking a cigarette. After a while two men sat down near me: then were joined by another gentleman. He looked like authoritarian. One of the others looked at me and asked, “You are Catholic priest, I assume?” – “Absolutely correct sir,” I replied. - “Me and my partner, we’re both from Oklahoma. We are both Methodists!” Immediately the third one began puffing in the aroma of his fragrant cigar. The others began talking religion. They wondered about why there were so many different religions in the world, so many persuasions. Why could not there be just one religions and the similar questions? I explained as best I could. The cigar man sat quietly but took in the smoke of the cigar as well as the words we had spoken. My Methodist, right off the cuff, said, “At that moment the third man took up the conversation with a start: “Gentlemen, I believe in nothing! In my opinion, every nationality, like ever religion is nothing but party affiliation or personal prejudice which promotes inimical relationships with each other. Nations and religions hand out their brand of happiness and peace. The foundation of mixed marriages is mutual love; everything else, whether nationality or religion, is means nothing”. After that outburst, he looked at me victoriously and satisfaction and returned to his quietness. At that point, the Methodist put in his two cents? I agree and I also disagree. If we were limiting out comment only as regards to religion, I have nothing against it. However I am a liberal, but not a bigot nor a fanatic. I understand that it is unreasonable and laughable to get in the way with youth and a loved one from the reason of differing opinion. But it also pertains to keeping the nationality and I am an American, and I do not want our nation to be wiped off the face of the earth!” The dispute was carried on in greater length, but I return to my talk entitled:

“OUR CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT MARRIAGE”

Last Sunday, we arrived at the moment, when the Catholic party came to an agreement with the proposition of the non-Catholic wife, in order that their son Robert, after completing his fourth year elementary education in the parochial school would transfer to a public school, in order that he would become knowledgeable about the two types of education. And now, I give voice to the protestant wife who says, “And so when Robert finished fourth grade, Jerry was of ready for school and so we agreed to send both of them to Public School, so that they go to the same school and the same methodology. Jerry will be sent to parochial school for his last four years. The same day, on which we registered the boys in school, the telephone rang. Paul went to the corridor to answer the phone. For the next twenty minutes a conversation ensued. I was in the busy in the kitchen. I just heard snippets of the conversation punctuated with “Yes, Father” and “No, Father”. I figured he was speaking with a priest. When finally Paul hung up the phone and returned to the kitchen he looked pale and distraught. I thought perhaps he was ill. He sat down heavily and took a deep breath. “If we keep the boys in public school, then the Sacraments of my Church will be rescinded. - “But why?” I asked impatiently. “After all, all denominations are represented in Public Schools.” “It is why I want and wish and demand that my sons have grounding in American ways, and that demands an education in public schools. Paul shook his head. “I cannot explain it. Besides, whether we like it or not, it’s the way it is and has to be that way and no other. If we sent the children to public schools, what it means is that you have broken the promise to bring up the children in the Catholic Faith and so be disenfranchised from my church.” It is then that the real confrontation began. In one second, the ulcer which had grown for twelve long years. I could no longer restrain myself from mentioning my humiliation and sorrows. I reminded my husband that America was a country of religious freedom and tolerance, but instead, in my own family, there was no freedom of religion or tolerance. I disagreed and protested that whenever I wished to bring up my sons apart from the dictates of the Catholic religion, but my pre-marital promises were so strict and strictly binding that now I am prepared to break them without looking at the consequences. And so whatever Paul and I tried to understand or explain, it ended up and unchanging as far as the unbreakable rule of the Catholic Church in regard to the rearing of children, which are ironclad and unyielding, which is a cold fact that if broken even to the smallest letter, the sacraments would be denied to whomever breaks their promises. Breaking them was disloyalty and unthinkable to the rest of the family as well. Exhausted, sorrowful, and bitter, I threw such a bitter complaint: "This proves one fact that neither of us is willing keep the promise. I'm not exactly willing to keep to the solemnly promise once signed, you are not willing to promise me that Robert will go to a public school. We both do not take it too seriously and promise each other “to work things out.” It all goes as it went before except I always step aside, keep quiet and suffer. And since we both do not wish to keep our prenuptial promises, the time has come to separate. Paul kept silent and said nothing. After a while, the storm passed by. Both of us were hurt on account of the situation. After all, both of us had two children and a third on the way, we were both healthy and so why break up? But why break up because we have different religious beliefs? It seemed to us a monstrosity and brutality. But, at this point, we felt that there was no other solution and both maintained that we would “work it out.” We were convinced that it was a matter with Paul’s Church and I had to step aside and agree to the prenuptial promises in order for our marriage to survive. Paul was aware of all of this and knew my hurt and was sympathetic with the whole situation. Despite all of this, his long standing blind adherence to church and obedience to the doctrines of the Catholic faith was so deeply impeded in his soul that he had to decide on these matters. The next day we took our sons from the public school and registered them in parochial schools. When our third son was six months old, we had to move to a small town in Illinois! When little Joseph grew up to be school age, we did not enter any disputes about how to bring him up, but sent him to the parochial school. Luckily, in our town there is not Catholic high school and sour sons will be able to spend at least four years in public high school.” – It is a happy thought and I am grateful. At least when they enter the world, they will be open to life with Jewish and Protestant children as well as youth without any faith. This touching the lives of those of different faiths or no faith at all will give him tolerance for those of different faith removing the idea of bigotry. Currently, I stand quietly aside and do not take part in the religion of my sons. True, I went to their church with them but I always felt estranged and uninvited. I felt like an intruder especially during Communion time. During their schooling, I spent many hours helping them in doing their homework. I taught them to read, write, and do their math. But when it came to the catechism, which is required of Catholics, I did not participate. I could not teach them what I, myself, did not believe in. At times, I wished to explain what it was that was different in our beliefs in order that they might understand what my belief was. Before and after meals, the boys would say the prayers taught by the nuns in school. When the children were small, I prepared them for sleep at night by kissing them good-night. After that, Paul would enter their bedrooms and said their prayers with them. I could not participate with these ritual prayers. I had to move aside. That not only hurt but mortally wounded my feelings that I could not participate in the prayers with my family. My mother, each evening, said the prayers with us and I could not do the same with my family. That so riveted itself in my mind that to this day I feel offended and humbled. Often Paul and the children go to Sunday Mass and when they return, I am dressing to go to the devotions of my church. Sometimes little Joseph who is still too young to understand many things pertaining to religion would say longingly “Mommy, can go with you, Mommy!” Naturally I did not want to refuse him, but it is forbidden, because if I wanted to deny his request which was not allowed, in preparation for confession he would ask, “Did I commit a sin?” among others, “by attending a different church. Certainly, I could not reasonably permit the boy to do that which is termed sinful and which he should confess and do a penance for. How wide and liberal could tolerance be, or beset with liberality? Without doubt, each mother should feel sadness when in her authority she should say that her church was taboo. Such difficulties and worries in the field of religion in daily affairs a mother should have! In the eyes of a Protestant, it is of little importance, inconsequential. For what is human flesh after death? But it was not pleasant for me to hear my son say: Mom, you and I cannot be buried in the same cemetery, really? In the children’s years our pastor was equivalent with our doctor in visiting our home. Now, I see and understand how my friends and those I know rely on the help of their pastors in the rearing of their children. Our family does not have a pastor, a shepherd. The Catholic priest does not come close to us, never drops in. I know him only from sight. My pastor understands my situation but until I fulfill my personal obligations. As a result, I feel disfranchised spiritually and intellectually not that my husband and children are isolated from me but that I cannot explain to them the condition I am in and my status as a protestant. In a family in which neither husband nor wife practice their faith, where both are lax in their faith the lack of understanding and co-workmanship may not be that significant in meaningfulness. But two people who both have deep religious convictions, but differ, join hands and who have a deep religious conviction, and I say this from personal conviction and from experience they will never completely keep their marriage peaceful, happy, and self-fulfilling. Mixed marriages are something unnatural. In a word, it is a religious freak.

 A few years ago, a pamphlet came into my hands entitled, “Marry Your Own Kind!” It was a small publication for Catholic youth. The author wished to implant into the consciousness of Catholic youth, the idea that the marriage couple, at every instance, without exception, be a Catholic man with a Catholic woman and a Catholic woman with a Catholic man. It is true because a marriage is always a certain hazardous risk. When I read the arguments given by the author of the pamphlet, I was quite disturbed. I thought that is was a monstrous, disgusting and un-American thing to try to convince others that the Catholic teaching was the only way to marry; that young people ought to seek a partner for life who was of the same belief system. At that time I thought it was one-sided, wrong and fatal. Today, I don’t feel that way. Today I change my thoughts on that. My sons are Catholic. As far as I know, they are good Catholics. If they remain loyal Catholics, I hope that they are loyal to the Church and will choose to take on marriage with Catholics. I would have a lot to say on the subject and have advice to give couples who are not of the same faith and have different views and have the will to keep the marriage vows and say to themselves: “We’ll work things out!” But they shouldn’t listen to all the advice given them. Why so? I hope that my sons would listen to advice given in the Catholic propaganda pamphlet: “Marry your own kind.” Because only that way there will be peace and fulfillment in the true sense with understanding and less tension. Perhaps some will find it curious that I included my wife’s contention of her faith and her sometimes illogical positions and her claim of the too ironclad teaching of the Catholic Church. Generally, it makes sense that our young people hear from the lips of my protestant wife, her thoughts and how she feels and lives through a mixed marriage. It’s a pity that I didn’t manage to hear that sincere expression of a Catholic’s Protestant wife before. That would be even more interesting. I call your attention to the obvious criticism extant in a mixed marriage position which does not jive with the idea of Christian love, with justice and with tolerance on the protestant spouse’s part. Religious propaganda becomes operative and a fantasy on the part of the Catholic’s stringent position, because the children are taken away from the protestant wife. Perhaps it would be better if the sons went with the religion of the father, and daughters with the religion of the mother. Then there would be some balance in the marital state. It is a violation of the rights of parents – to raise children in a religion which they cannot decide as better. Besides, these and other criticisms are nothing new. They are not only made by non-Catholics bug what one might term liberals and progressives, who have eaten from the same dish and stretched their feet under the same table and so they know a little except the catechism. They acknowledge the practicality of it but not the Catholic catechism. These parade with their own non-prejudicial tolerance. Please listen to this: if the Catholic Church forced the non-Catholics to marry with Catholic parties –if despite protests from their side, married them and the confiscated and took away their children, baptized them and forced them to take on Catholicism, then indeed fanatic criticisms, intolerance and denial of preternatural rights would be truthful. But the Catholic Church never forces not-Catholics to adhere to its catechism nor forbid marriage to Catholics – then the criticism doesn’t have any foundation in truth, any worth, or sense. Then, why the big fuss? After a voluntary agreement, promise, promise rehearsal dinner, in which the non-Catholic party agrees to the conditions, required by the church, no one will maintain that it is forced, and so one can’t call this coercion. The non-Catholic party may not agree to the conditions and not take part in the Catholic marriage. But if the non-Catholic party does not agree, every reasoning person must admit that no fault can be imputed to him or her. In reality, the church gives a reason of tolerance, because it doesn’t be critical in its demeanor at the non-Catholic. It permits marriage which is distasteful to mixed marriages because of danger to salvation. The promises do not destroy mutual love or other mutually beneficial factors. As regards to children in mixed marriages, they have the right not to be deterred from the Catholic religion. As far as sons going with their father and girls with their mothers – there’s no greater nonsense. The apostle says in his letter to the Corinthians:”Do you not know that you are the Church of Christ and the spirit of God dwells in you? And whoever disturbs the Church of Christ - God does not look favorably on that person, and remember that you are the Church of God.” In summary, mixed marriages endanger the Catholic party as well as the future of the children who become part of the church. The Catholic party is challenged in regard to fasting, Mass attendance, receiving the Sacraments etc. The faith is weakened and challenged as well as the moral upbringing of the children. The father has one notion; the mother has another which is confusing to the children. They tend to not practice as they are challenged in their youth. The weakening of faith in mixed marriage can contribute to lack of love and a home engulfed in controversy. In the midst of so many sad and tragic elements flowing from a mixed marriage and in the midst of directives of the church that are at peril, I suggest : “Marry you own kind.”