

## After romance and glamour fade

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appreciating the positive potential for growth that accompanies the changing character of their relationship.

In dealing with Christian couples, I find it useful to place Peck's psychological insights into a larger philosophical and theological framework. While he defines love in terms of will and decision, it seems better to me to describe love as a total response with emotional and intellectual dimensions as well as important volitional ones.

Ideally, love prompts an individual who has achieved a sufficient degree of self-possession to reach out freely to another person to establish mutually enriching relationships. While benefiting the person we love, we grow at the same time, by breaking out of

selfishness and developing our potential.

Intelligence should guide this free decision to risk one's autonomy for another and should be receptive to the new knowledge only love can bring.

Genuine love does not rule out romantic feelings, but places them in a larger context of mutual care. The delights of love as well as its disappointments, throw us back on the gracious mystery that sustains and allures us. Because God has first loved us, we can take the risk of loving others and make the effort to become better lovers.

Belief in a God who is love gives us confidence that love is always worthwhile and ultimately full of meaning. For Christians, this belief becomes concrete in the life of Jesus, our model of love generously given and fully rewarded.

During a recent conversation with a young couple

preparing for marriage, I noted the usual utopian optimism. They seemed as impervious to advice or criticism as most couples in love.

But when I asked what they intended to do when they "fell out of love," the tenor of our discussion changed dramatically.

With surprising seriousness, they asked what I meant, listening intently to my psychological and theological explanations. They quickly picked up on the challenge of becoming genuine lovers, discussing how they were going to work at overcoming their faults and selfish tendencies in order to help each other grow.

She, for example, had to curb her selfish desire to dominate his time while he had to overcome his fears in order to share his feelings more.

As they extended their discussion, it seemed to me that I was witnessing an important moment, as a new realism entered their relationship.

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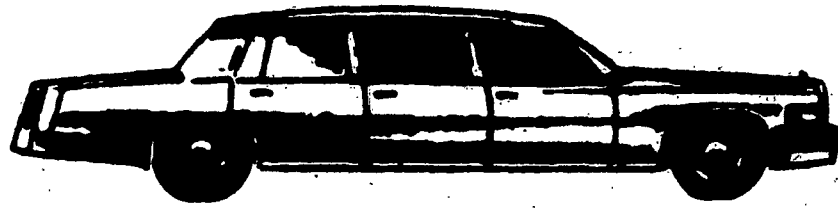
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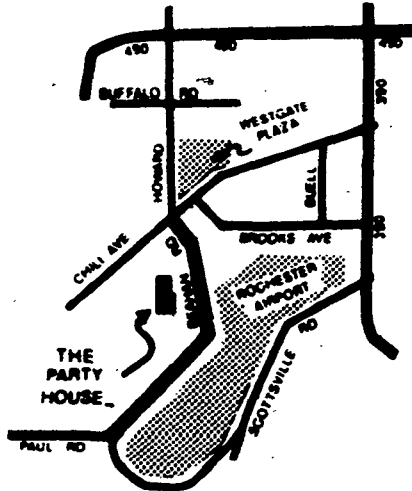
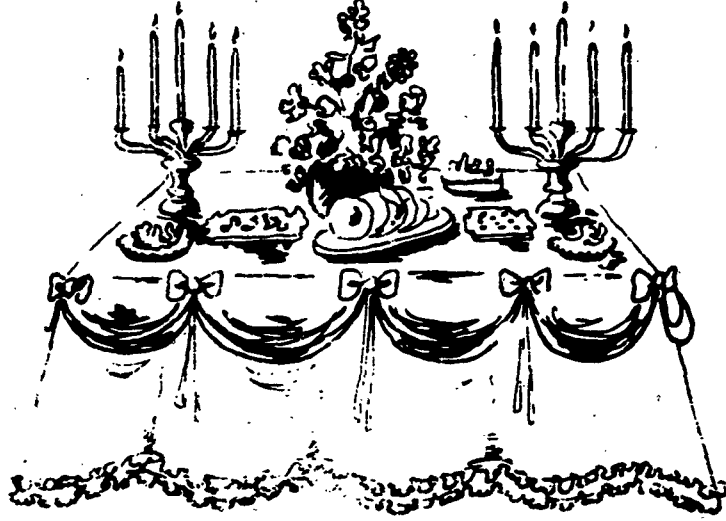
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