

Authority and Me
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Why can't they let me do what I want to? It's always "do this" or "don't do that."
Especially my mother: "The rules of the house are...." Another one I always love is "I don't care what your friends do; in this house, we do it this way."

Well, that's all right. But it doesn't end there. Now I have to put up with the school and the Church and the government. Why? Why can't they all realize that we have minds of our own. My history teacher is always trying to tell us that all these rules – you know – the "authority" – are here to help and protect us and that we sometimes think that we can remove all rules. But, I could never accept that. It sounded like the same old line again.

Then I discussed it with our Priest, Father Michael. He's young, so I thought that at least he would understand what I meant. I asked him why the Church even had to be authoritative? Well, he explained that the greatest authority, the greatest law, was *love* and that is the over-riding law, the one given to us by Christ. He went on to tell us that because men are so weak and so often do not follow that absolute law of love, that the society as a whole has found it necessary to protect all the people with a certain authority. He made the point that we wouldn't need police if people followed the absolute law – that way they wouldn't harm each other. But people just don't follow the law of love. Anyway, I left our meeting that evening with many questions: Protection? Love? Authority? I simply couldn't make the connection.

Well, I continued in my confusion over just what authority really meant throughout the next year – that was my junior year in high school. And it was strange how I finally came to the answer.

It was during the period right after my father and I had the big "blow-out." I just couldn't stand it anymore. He was always asking questions: Where are you going? Why? Do you think it's the right thing? I simply couldn't stand it any more!

I left on a Saturday night. It was mid-December, moving toward Christmas. I always heard about "running away from home" but it was somehow different for me, I thought. Was I really running away? The fact that it was Christmas, I guess, made it worse.

In any case, I was heading for the home of Tommy Boline. I remember his parents who had come to visit Tommy when we were both at summer camp together. My parents had never met Tommy. His mom and dad were really great, I thought. They understood youth, they "communicated" – something which I thought my parents never did. They never questioned Tommy and he really knew how to have a real blast! His Dad always praised him. I remember him telling Tommy how proud he was 'cause he got A's in French and 'cause he was such a good baseball player.

It took me two days of hitch-hiking to get there. I figured that by now my parents found my note explaining that I didn't know exactly what was going to come of this and that I just had to get away. I knew that they would be furious and, of course, my mom would worry and cry and all that. I felt bad about that. School? Well, I didn't sweat that. My marks were good.

Tommy answered the door on that Monday evening. I guess the whole family was kind of surprised and shocked, but after I warmed up a bit and had a hot cup of tea, I explained the whole business to them. And, as I expected, they agreed with me and promised not to call my parents. I still had plenty of money left from my savings – that would last until I decided what the next step was for me.

And it was the life for the first five or six days. I knew by this time that my parents were frantic. Tommy told me that my picture was in the paper and all. It was just what I figured they'd do; they always were worriers.

Tommy's family was preparing for Christmas like everyone else. I was feeling a little blue by now, but I knew it would pass after the Christmas season. One consolation was that at least they weren't the "religious" kind – you know – Church and Christ and all. They were like "normal" people; only concerned about the shopping and the parties that were soon to follow. I thought they were really great. MY family even had a kind of Fast during Advent – it wasn't like Great Lent at Easter, but we were never allowed to forget that Christmas was a particular Feast of the Church – a HOLY day. And of course, my father always reminded us that we were to fast before we feast. I always felt the whole attitude was "odd" – not like all the rest of the "normal" people. And it was even embarrassing sometimes, especially in front of my friends. It was simply TOO religious – simply TOO much.

It was three days before Christmas now and I began to get this strange feeling. I guess you never really see yourself and your style of life until you're on the outside. I began to realize that Tommy, with all his "freedom" was unhappy! I couldn't believe it! His parents allowed him to do anything he wanted. It wasn't like MY family; they all did what they wanted – each did his own thing, as they say. Of course, they did nothing together and they never had to consider and be bothered with what the other one felt. And so, Tommy didn't have to worry about "eating with the family" or going to Church with the family. The maid just cooked a bunch of food and we ate when we felt like it. Really – it was great! Anyway, they couldn't eat together because his father didn't get home 'til late. And his mother, she really didn't have the time; she had her own things to do, like ladies meetings and card parties and other things. And Church? They simply didn't have time to bother.

Well, like I said, I began to feel uncomfortable about the whole thing. I wasn't sure whether Tommy really wanted to be "free" like I thought. He really couldn't stand either of his parents – he simply couldn't care less about anything they did. And what was worse, I began to notice, was that he was always unsure of himself; I mean he couldn't make a decision. He was literally a "slave" to what other kids told him. Strange – h was a "free slave."

It was the next day – two days before Christmas – that it happened. Tommy’s mother and dad were in a bad car accident coming home from some last minute Christmas shopping. They were both put into the hospital – I guess it was really bad. Luckily, they had the maid – there were no relatives in this part of the country. What was strange is that things simply went on like nothing ever happened! I simply couldn’t get over it. Tommy didn’t seem all that concerned and it started to bug me. Didn’t he appreciate the fact that they “understood him”...that they weren’t such extreme authorities, that they allowed him to be free?

The night passed. And the next day, they had no school – it was vacation time by now. And none of them even thought of going to the hospital. I was really shook by the weirdness of it. That evening I figured it was time for a rap session with Tommy. I just had to do it. I went to his room and pointedly asked him. What kind of person was he? Didn’t he have any feelings? At first he just blankly stared at me. I guess he never really figured I’d do this. Then he said that he knew that they were okay. But I pushed it. It was almost like trapping an animal, I thought. And you know what? He simply broke down in tears! I couldn’t believe it! And he couldn’t stop. He wept like a baby. He told me things that I really couldn’t understand at that point. He said that he wanted to care – he wanted to be concerned – but he didn’t know how. I thought he must be crazy! He didn’t feel that he was “free” from his parents like I thought; he read it as simply a lack of concern on the part of his mom and dad. If they would have cared, they would have showed it. He felt so very alone in the world – a slave! And I thought he was free! He actually wanted authoritative help.

My God, I thought! Father Michael was right! If they only could have expressed the love that they had for him by applying, at least, a balanced authority – one which showed that they cared. But they didn’t and now he was free and yet somehow lost! And the greatest law – the law of love was not there. Maybe authority in its proper perspective didn’t only mean slavery – maybe it helped!

I went to my room – the guest room on the third floor. And for the first time in my life I really prayed. Tommy’s reaction really shook me. I prayed that he would be able to be concerned – and it may seem like a ridiculous thing to pray for, but it was all I could do. It seemed the only way that he would be able to live normally. And I prayed for myself too. I knew now that there was only one thing for me to do, and I needed strength, more than I knew I had.

It was Christmas eve when my mom and dad came to pick me up. Of course, they were happy and yet angry. I expected that. I thought my dad would kill me. But even their anger strangely pleased me at this point. It meant that the love was there – the love that I knew we always had amongst ourselves – the love that poor Tommy wished he could find some expression of.

Maybe I’ll never really understand all the aspects of authority. I know it’s a complicated issue today. But I do know that there are people who really miss it – like Tommy.

It was only five minutes after we started for home – it was dusk – and it started to snow lightly, Dad said we'd reach home by morning. Mom said she hoped the kids got to sleep early enough for us all to go to the Christmas Divine Liturgy. I love snow on Christmas.

Poor Tommy. Poor, poor Tommy. The snow looked beautiful and I felt relieved -- almost like a child – to be with them. God, poor Tommy though.