

OPEN MINDS" CAN BE A VACUUM PIT

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When recently asked by a reporter why there is such tolerance for anti-Catholicism, I offered that nothing is worse in our society today than the thought of being branded close-minded, and this is especially true of the educated classes. That is why so many Catholics can't summon the moral courage to defend their faith—they are deathly afraid of being seen as close-minded. So in the face of Catholic bashing, they demur.

But an open mind can be a vacuum pit. A mind that tolerates everything, one that is forever non-judgmental, is utterly mindless. Even the smallest of social relations, a dyad, is based on two people being sufficiently discerning to draw boundaries on what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behavior.

Being close-minded is not analogous to espousing the virtue of bourgeois values. Those values, the values of the middle class, are what makes western civilization tick. Responsibility, duty, civility, sustained effort, punctuality, etc.—these bourgeois values have nothing to do with fostering close-mindedness and everything to do with fostering self-mastery.

All bourgeois values are based on some element of constraint. Unfortunately, large segments of our society today reflect a disdain for such values, and hold in contempt those who insist on the application of traditional norms. Quite simply, upholding the legitimacy of the Judeo-Christian ethos is automatic grounds for being labeled close-minded.

In August, *USA Today* did a survey on the causes of moral decline. Nearly 60 percent of adults said that declining moral

values is the most serious problem facing the country. Explaining the decline, 80 percent blamed "Society too tolerant of bad behavior" and 62 percent cited "Reduced influence of religion."

One of the reasons why we tolerate so much bad behavior is because religion has lost much of its influence: we live in a society where the mere mention of "Thou Shalt Not" is likely to be greeted with cat-calls. The passion for self-indulgence, which began in the 1960s as a cultural celebration and is now *de rigueur* among the kids of the baby boomers, finds problematic the very conception of self-denial. Those who denounce liberty-as-license are, of course, condemned for being close-minded.

Tolerating bad behavior is exactly what our cultural elites did when confronted with the savagery of Woodstock '99. Here is what an AP story said of the rock-concert extravaganza: "The toll for Woodstock '99 now stands at two deaths; four reported rapes on the festival grounds; the sexual assault of a 15-year-old girl outside the grounds; and, according to doctors who worked at the three-day music festival, between 7,500 and 10,000 people treated for some sort of medical problem." The death figure was actually three—a young girl was killed in a traffic accident as she left the event. And a fifth rape victim has now come forward.

What was so touching about the cannibalism that marked the festival was the use of "peace candles" to burn the place down. Letta Taylor, a staff writer for *Newsday*, gave the details. Describing what happened the last night of the fest, Taylor said "hundreds of concertgoers went on a rampage that began when they set small fires that quickly turned into bonfires. Within minutes, youths were gleefully setting fire to truck containers and vehicles, overturning giant sound and light towers, pillaging vending vents and throwing bottles and rocks at police."

When the smoke cleared, Taylor observed, the grounds “looked like a war zone. Piles of twisted steel and charred rubble smoldered on the tarmac [of a former Air Force base], filling the air with noxious fumes. Overturned portable toilets lay in pools of sewage. The camping area was a ghost town, littered with tents and sleeping bags abandoned by terrified concertgoers who’d fled the melee.”

Not surprisingly, the rapes and killings took place amidst plenty of drugs and booze. The men and women went naked, with 125 of them posing nude for pictures. Rock bands sang lyrics like, “I’m gonna kill you,” and when the group, Limp Bizkit, started singing “Break Stuff,” the savages dutifully complied.

But it was all worth it. “There are no rules here, everybody can just let loose and have a good time,” said a 21 year-old woman from New Jersey. Perhaps she can now apply for a White House internship.

These kids came to Woodstock via college and were thus completely programmed to worship the environment, respect women’s rights and promote the cause of peace. Yet they destroyed the earth, raped the women and killed their fellow man. For this they got off scot-free: the cultural elite refused to be judgmental, knowing full-well that nothing is worse than being called close-minded. And that is why this will happen again. They just don’t get it.