

DON FEDER

There's a hole in the moral ozone layer, says the Josephson Institute. So, what else is new?

The organization conducted a two-year survey of 9,000 young people (ages 15 through 30) on value questions. The project yielded disquieting results.

Of high school students, 33 percent admitted shoplifting in the past year. One in five college students said they would falsify a report to keep a job. Nearly two-thirds of high school students cheated on an exam within the last 12 months. The institute calls its data, "significant evidence that the present ... generation is more likely to engage in dishonest and irresponsible conduct than previous generations."

The tragic depths of the problem may be ascertained by another study, wherein a psychologist at the University of California at Los Angeles interviewed 288 freshmen males, asking each if he would commit rape if he knew he could get away with it. One in four said they would.

My generation, the baby boomers, declared that we would make the world more decent, humane and up-

Don Feder is a nationally syndicated columnist.

Gaping hole in the moral ozone layer

right than ever before. The generation we reared, the baby busters, are the most self-centered and amoral the world has ever seen.

Values don't come from a vacuum; kids don't absorb them by osmosis. It was the questioning of traditional standards—faith, family, loyalty to employer, community and country, personal responsibility—that started in the '60s, which led to the present malaise.

The entertainment media furthered the process by inculcating cynicism and a live-for-the-moment ethic. The geeks and freaks it holds up for the admiration of the young are alienated, conniving and hedonistic.

Our schools have become incubators of the new amoral order. Former Education Secretary William Bennett described the phenomenon in his 1992 book "The De-Valuing of America": "Starting in the early '70s, 'values clarification' programs started turning up in schools all over America. According to the philosophy, schools were not to take part in their time-honored task of transmitting sound moral values; rather, they

were to allow the child to 'clarify' his own values. ... The values clarification movement didn't clarify values, it clarified wants and desires. This form of moral relativism said, in effect, that no set of values was right or wrong; everybody had an equal

It was the questioning of traditional standards that started in the '60s, which led to the present malaise.

right to his own values; and all values were subjective, relative, personal."

Educational malpractice aside, by far our worst mistake was insulating the young from spiritual ideals. Absent a religious foundation, morality becomes a matter of personal preference—more often than not, a code of convenience.

We go to ludicrous lengths to keep children from encountering the eternal. A moment of silence at the beginning of a school day? Tantalizing to the establishment of a national church! An invocation at a public school commencement? Unconstitutional! Religious references are neatly excised from textbooks. The Pilgrims have thus been transformed from religious sojourners to merry adventurers.

If a politician mentions God, it's considered the equivalent of a declaration of jihad on religious minorities and unbelievers. Mississippi Gov. Kirk Fordice was nearly skinned alive when he recently observed that America is a Christian nation.

What the governor meant is that our national character was shaped by that ethos expounded in Jewish and Christian Scriptures. "The less we emphasize the Christian religion, the further we fall into the abyss of poor character and chaos," Mr. Fordice observed. Add the prefix Judeo, and he's absolutely correct.

Religion is hardly a talisman, protecting the possessor from life's

myriad temptations. But it does help. There is a paucity of studies comparing religious commitment with proper conduct. Those there are suggest a strong connection. For instance, a 1986 Planned Parenthood study of adolescent sexuality showed that teens who attend religious services regularly are less than half as likely to engage in premarital sex as those who seldom or never go to church or synagogue.

More than 10,000 people were arrested in the rioting that rocked Los Angeles in May. The Catholic Church operates a fair number of schools in the city; enrollment is mostly black and Hispanic. I'd wager that an infinitesimal number of their students and graduates were among the looters and arsonists.

Ecologists blame the use of fluorocarbons for dissipation of the ozone layer. Cultural pollutants are eating away the moral ozone. As long as we're afraid to talk about God, to tell our children about absolute values—as long as the elite continues its war on faith—the hole will widen. The radiation that gets through will cause moral mutants at which the world will shudder.