

Said the little boy explaining his dismal report card to his parents, "I am not an underachiever: my teacher is an overexpecter." In Japan's schools, overexpecting is driving an appalling number of children to suicide--in diametrical contrast to the underexpecting that has been so high a factor in the low academic performance of black and hispanic children in America's public schools....This thinksheet reflects about the art of expecting.

1. God expects us to "be holy, for I am holy": nothing less than sainthood will do. We face here, however, an ineluctable tension between (1) humankind and (2) me, vis-a-vis "the will of God." And all are, willy-nilly and inescapably, theologians vis-a-vis both dimensions of confrontation with the Holy Will. In KJV language, "what manner of men ought we to be" toward one another in light of this double divine assignment to discern and decide and do? Certainly, humble (with penitence) and helpful (without presumption).

2. Tyranny treats people as mere stimulus/response organisms, then is surprised by "spirit," which despots are unprepared to expect. A favorite Fosdick quote of mine: "Democracy assumes that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people." In this sense, all revolutions from below spring forth from faith in the people taking the form of expecting them to produce their own freedom, or at least their own predisposition to expect and welcome their freedom. Tyrannous philosophies (1) over-expect from their political success and (2) underexpect the subsequent challenges to their power--a truth illustrated in praxis since Alcibiades tried out Plato's REPUBLIC.

3. Democratic elements within a people's revolution underexpect their power to yield to the power-lust of the tyrannous elements. ITEM: The FSLN's subversion (to one-party Leninism) of the Sandinista revolution. The other side of the same flaw: The democratic elements overexpect that the humanity and collegiality of the tyrannous elements in the early stages will carry over into pluralism (meaning the democratic participation in power once the revolution is successful).

4. Extraverts and introverts overexpect each other to behave rationally and underexpect the dismal consequences to their relationship with each other emerging from this overexpectation. Mondale can, in debate, wipe up the floor with Reagan; and the same public that admits it will in two weeks (Oct/84 is this thinksheet's date) put Reagan back into the White House because "we like him." It's no better in church leadership than in statecraft: how teach the children so without pushing them into cynicism? Teach them to sing the gospel song "....Grace that is greater than all our sin."

5. Parenting, pastoring, all caregiving needs loving, fellow-feeling encouraging of curiosity, "baby steps for baby feet," praise for discoveries made and courage acted on. In short, great teaching, which steadily expects without over- or under-expecting. This factor excludes an "audience" so large you can't know your hearers in their individuality.

6. Heroic expectation: God's, of us. What's the point of the Bible's expecting us to keep covenant with God and one another when there are millenia of evidence that we don't intend to, or at least our intention is weaker than our greeds and lusts for other things? Here is the gracious mystery of the divine irrationality.