

Both the European Renaissance and the (1830-) American Renaissance obscured, where not denying, this "lowliness" (the root meaning of KJV's "abase" and others' "humble"---as also of the word in English which best conveys the BVR (basic visceral response): "grovel"). Jesus uses this ironically of the sly social-climber (L.14.11), in panning "reserved seats" (Mt.23.1-12 TEV), and of the groveling, eyes-lowered, chest-beating publican (L.18.9-14).

VALUES: "WORTH" VIS-A-VIS DIGNITY.....Elliott #473
(Theocentric humility versus anthropocentric-neurotic-humanistic self/other-"worth.")

At Breakfast for the Hungry Hearted this morning, a rich Mexican-born American woman, as we were working on peace education as topic and action, introduced the ethnicity factor. "'Chicano' is a slur appellation." Another compared the elevation of the slur into dignity with the experience of "Christian." Another, of "Black." I said, "Would you rather I call you a high-class wetback?"--which in fact she didn't mind, and was jocular about, because having no personal bad memories of. Then she said, "Everyone has the right to be treated as worthy; everyone is worthy of everyone else's respect and concern."

I had to say, as gently as I could--and she did come to comprehend what I meant, hindu-ish though be her present consciousness--that I do not consider my neighbor worthy of my respect automatically, though every neighbor I see as having potential for behavior I might respect and thus come to respect the person. Of course she was talking inherency, ontology, and its philosophical correlate, humanism (and the Human Potential Movement, which she's deep into). It's only with enormous effort that the American people are coming to have the proper disrespect for Richard Nixon--impeded as we are by the aura, bright for some and dim for others, of the Oval Room. In each relationship/moment, the Christian (indeed, the human being) should respond with just the degrees of respect/disrespect the situation calls for, not with knee-jerk disrespect [as the cynic and nihilist] or knee-jerk respect [as the romantic and humanist].

Words, words! But not "only" words. If one is taught and believes in automatic respect for humans as humans, one cannot respect Jewish and Christian Scripture at the many points where they call such automatic respect into question, insulting the ego and godless human achievements, viewing humankind as in violation of its origin and therefore doomed vis-a-vis its destiny, in need of heteronomous guidance, unworthy to stand before God and the world, deicidal [in story order: Eden, Abraham, Moses, Jesus].

One root of antisemitism is that Jews have this low view of human nature, this heavy moral sense of guilt and unworthiness that revulses the Greek in us and the autonomous ideal our civilization sets before us in its secular educational traditions. Nietzsche and Hugh Hefner, among others, understood this. Renegade Jews, preeminently Freud and Marx, played tricks with this heavy moral sense and this low view of human nature. Humanistic renegade Jews refuse to grovel before God, as a good Jew should (e.g., Is.6, Ps.51), and indeed jettison God for good riddance of groveling....No excuse for Christian antisemitism here: Christianity, with the accusation [against mankind, not just against Jews] of deicide, intensifies the Jewish low view of human nature, the heavy moral sense of guilt, the conviction of human unworthiness....Of course Jews and Christians also have a high view of human nature, the conviction of God's eagerness to forgive, and the sense of gratitude to and rejoicing in the presence of God for his accepting us, "unworthy though we be," and commissioning us to care for the unworthy neighbor [the more unworthy the better, for purposes of demonstrating that the caring roots in gratitude to God and is concern "in spite of" the particular unworthy neighbor's' disentitlement to our respect].

In Christian liturgy it's no accident that these expressions face each other: "Lord, I am not worthy" and "Worthy is the Lamb!" The whole picture and process is destroyed when worthiness is horizontalized, sucked out of God into humanity in self-deification [the Lucifer principle--Is.14.12]. Indeed, the existence of "wor[th]ship" as the celebration of the biblical God--its integrity and vitality, then its very existence--depends on the dual conviction that (1) we aren't worthy and (2) God is. Other possible positions are (1) we're worthy and God isn't and (2) both God and we are worthy--but neither position is an option for the Jew or the Christian....We'd better make cleaner use of our words vis-a-vis our Story, or we ourselves will participate first in the world's corrupting it and then in amnesia about it: we'll live some other story, as indeed most do.