

Transcending Cain and Abel: Revolutionary and Reactionary Consciousness

Gordon L. Anderson
March 15, 2016



In the *Divine Principle*, the biblical story of Cain and Abel is seen as two brothers in a fallen family. Abel's offering was accepted by God and Cain's was not; Cain got angry and killed Abel and then fled his parents to start a new life. Abel is described as "closer to God," but his consciousness is still that of an immature son and not a mature parent.

I often think of Cain and Abel as representing reactionary and revolutionary consciousness in the wider political spheres we see around us today. By "revolutionary" I mean the idea of "revolt" like

Cain's, and not peaceful revolution. These two different approaches to politics each claim to be right and when they compete with one another for political power, often end up repeating the "Fall" on a national scale.

Human society is always evolving as changes in science, technology and population lead to changes in human life. The reactionary refuses to adapt and looks for refuge in the past. The revolutionary recognizes the need for change but wants to violently jettison the past. The French Revolution and Communist Revolution in Russia are examples of "Cain-type" revolutions that led to violence and murder on a massive scale. By wiping out the traditional "reactionary" rulers, the Ancien Regime in France or the Czarist feudal system in Russia, and starting over, creating a new society, they ended up re-inventing many wheels and causing much evil, death and human suffering.



Gordon L. Anderson

In developmental psychology, Cain and Abel attitudes represent typical responses of children who begin to compare and question at age 12 or 13. Children are born like sponges and soak up the environment of their parents and nurturers; they initially know no other way of life than the traditions they are given. However, as they begin to individuate, particularly in middle school, they begin to compare their lives to those of other schoolmates who came from different homes, with differences in wealth, discipline, religion, family integrity, etc.

This is a dangerous period of growth. Rather than constructively going through this stage, forming new peer groups and learning to live together, some — particularly those that loved their childhood — are reactionary and dare not step outside the worldview of their parents. Others, particularly those who had unsatisfactory childhoods, experience such cognitive dissonance that they revolt against their parents. But maturity comes to the persons who transcend these two temptations and are able to transform themselves by retaining what was inherited that is valuable and improving and adapting in areas where new knowledge and better ways are presented. This is an integral approach.

The reactionary, while initially in the "Abel position" closer to "God," through parents and a life-sustaining tradition, can turn into a hateful fundamentalist. The revolutionary "Cain," on the other hand, can become cut off from who he or she essentially is and become rudderless, devoid of meaning, and often act out in destructive violence or succumb to physical addictions.

The historical debates between science and religion reflect these Cain and Abel views. In the West, the Christian religion was the cradle of truth for people. It contained many truths, such as the Ten Commandments and Sermon on the Mount, that enabled people to live together peacefully. These truths had evolved over thousands of years of human experience. The people who practiced them flourished. But scientific discoveries challenged many traditional teachings that were proven wrong or inadequate.

The reaction of the Church to, say, Copernicus, was an "Abel-type" reactionary approach. It was Abel-type because the immature child who clings to tradition is in a situation closer to God than the revolutionary who rejects the Church entirely. On the other hand, some Social Darwinists and Freudians who reject tradition, attempt to construct a new social system based on their insights in one field of science and often end up causing violence to every other area of human life. Thus, they are incapable of creating a society of human flourishing such as one that adopts functioning cultural traditions. The mature approach to the religion/science debate in the face of discoveries in biological evolution would be to reject the naïve creationism of the Church, but not its other teachings. It is childish to reject an entire book

because the grammar is wrong in one sentence or one fact is wrong.

A symptom of society being at a childhood level, at the top of the growth stage where the “Fall” can occur, is the factional division of “sides.” Thus, when you hear in the media “pro-government” and “anti-government” positions, what you are actually hearing is that both groups have childish attitudes, with the pro-government positions being naïvely reactionary, and the anti-government being naïvely revolutionary. Revolutionaries have discovered enough to know that all is not well, yet their self-centered and arrogant nature is unable to see the entire picture. Revolutionaries typically want to “throw out the baby with the bathwater.” This is one explanation of why *Divine Principle* says “the false precedes the true,” because a revolutionary approach is often a kneejerk “anti” approach to a needed change (the false) rather than an integral response to a needed change (the true).

Parental consciousness, or “God’s point of view” in *Divine Principle*, is integral. It is able to love everyone, regardless of whether they have the reactionary or revolutionary consciousness of children, or a mature parental consciousness. Good parents might side with certain behaviors exhibited by one child and side with other behaviors of another child, but they do not side with one child against the other.

Choosing to side with “Abel” is a form of protection for those unable to transcend their inherited situation. It is better to side with “Abel” and preserve a system that is still working than revolt with “Cain” and destroy everything that doesn’t conform to his insight. Ultimately the mature person must transcend the narrowness, pettiness, vagueness, and one-sidedness of both brothers that can result from failing to grapple integrally with the anxiety, dissonance, pain, and disruption that new discoveries create. Siding with “Cain” is tempting because Cain has glimpsed something false, limiting, or unjust in the inherited worldview, but revolt is rooted in childish or evil attitudes of revenge, jealousy and hatred that bring society backward and cause untold suffering. “Cain” lacks a mature consciousness when he abuses or denigrates others to achieve his own ends.



A current example of these attitudes can be seen in the different approaches taken towards political reform in Tunisia and Syria. Tunisia was changed when a desperate man publicly immolated himself in protest of unbearable conditions. This enabled people to realize that things needed to change, and the National Dialogue Quartet Group that won the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was able to bring about non-violent reforms of the Tunisian government.

However, in Syria, people have been choosing sides and fighting. People are being killed and displaced, innumerable buildings and the entire economy have been destroyed, and Syria has become lawless in most places creating a vacuum filled by groups like ISIS. Unfortunately, the United States “chose sides” in Syria by arming moderate rebels, indicating its own lack of maturity in foreign policy. Good parents might use force to restrain one child from killing another, but they do not pick up a gun and join one child and try to kill another.

Our world is at a dangerous point today because it is dominated by Cain and Abel views —childish views. Reactionary and revolutionary approaches are witnessed everywhere and, unfortunately, often championed by reporters in the media, military strategists, and leaders of powerful countries. Globalization has brought the world to the top of the growth stage and the chaos we witness is a result of the revolutionary and reactionary attitudes of children in leadership positions of power, but such leaders are not yet capable of genuine leadership.

In the U.S. presidential race, we witness the widely-recognized need to transcend the corrupt and inadequate government in Washington, D.C., but naïve reactionary views are being promoted on the right and naïve revolutionary views on the left. These views have appeal to voters who are also in the growth stage and reflect a general lack of development of parental consciousness in the American people as a whole. Integral presidential candidates will not appear on ballots if the candidate selection process is based on reactionary and revolutionary consciousness.

This understanding of Cain and Abel consciousness can also help people to understand the divisions among the children of True Parents in the Unification Movement, some of whom have been, for the most part, behaving as children. According to *Divine Principle*, if Adam and Eve had not fallen, if they had been True Parents, Cain and Abel would not have exhibited behaviors that led to the murder of Cain by Abel, for both would have been capable of transcending reactionary and revolutionary attitudes and gained parental consciousness.

Whatever problems might exist in the movement’s leadership level, neither reactionary nor revolutionary approaches will advance God’s providence. Only when each person can transcend the naïve and childish attitudes of reaction and revolt can he or she begin to engage in the constructive transformation of the

church or the world that is desperately needed. The world needs True Parents, and constructive transformers, not reactionaries or revolutionaries, leading it forward.

Dr. Gordon L. Anderson is the President of Paragon House, Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal on World Peace, and Adjunct Professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He earned an M.Div. in Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from Claremont Graduate University.

Graphic at top: “*Cain Slaying Abel*” by Jacopo Palma, circa 1590.