

Who did Cain and Abel marry?

In explaining Adam and Eve as parents of all, how do we explain where all the people really came from, since it's impossible for two people to populate the entire earth without incest?

The Jewish and Christian traditions have always maintained that Cain, Abel, and later Seth married their sisters. From a biblical standpoint, there's no getting around that conclusion. Even more, Pope Pius XII, in his 1950 encyclical concerning some false opinions threatening to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine (*Humani Generis*), explicitly ruled out the alternative—polygenism, which is the theory that we are descended from multiple sets of parents. Here's what the Pope wrote in that regard:

“When, however, there is question of another conjectural opinion, namely polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own” (no. 37, citing Romans 5:12-19 and the Council of Trent).

It should also be pointed out that the descent of humanity from a single set of parents was confirmed by studies of mitochondrial DNA in population worldwide back in the 1980s. While that may not have been a “politically correct” finding, it did make the cover of TIME magazine and other newsweeklies at the time.

I understand that the troubling issue of incest remains. From the above, we have to say that incest is not an inherent evil, but is wrong when there is any alternative to propagating the race. The reasons it is wrong are that it confuses family relationships (for example, one's mother and aunt are the same woman, or one's father and grandfather are the same man) and introduces sexual desire into the family, where it is disruptive to peace.

Clearly the Church condemns incest as a grave sin against the dignity of marriage (1 Cor. 5:1, 4-5; Catechism, no. 2388), and most reprehensible is the rape of children by their parents (incest) or by those responsible for their education or spiritual formation (Catechism, no. 2356).

As for teaching young children, I think most can understand, without getting into more sensitive areas, that at the beginning of the world relatives had to marry each other, but that such marriages are no longer necessary or acceptable.