
Darwin and religion



Activity 4: Religion and the community

Subject: RE

2 x 60 minutes

Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[Darwin and religion](#)

What do I need?

[Letter 282](#) Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox,
9-12 August, 1835

[Letter 9122](#) Charles Darwin to Unidentified,
November-December, 1833

[Letter 12879](#) Charles Darwin to James Fegan,
December 1880 - February 1881

[Letter 6486](#) Charles Darwin to J. B. Innes,
1 December 1868

[Letters questions](#)

[Who's who?](#)

Darwin was involved with the affairs of his village, contributing to local charities and church and school finances. After reading more about Darwin's views and values, consider whether we need to be religious to contribute to our local communities today.

What do I do?

1. List 5 things that you know about Charles Darwin and share with the class.
2. Read the letters, Who's who? and answer letters questions.
3. Discuss how the letters that you have read add to this knowledge? What was surprising to learn?
4. Draw a mind map with the words 'religious community' at the centre. Add the kinds of welfare and support that is offered through being part of a religious community. Share with the class.
5. Discuss how important religion is to a community. To what extent do you believe that you need to be religious to carry out works that benefit people around you?
6. Write a report on what is the role of the individual, religion and the government in creating a caring society today?
7. Carry out a small survey to find out what those around you think and report back on your findings.

Letter 282 Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox, [9–12 Aug] 1835

Lima
July, 1 1835

My dear Fox,

...This voyage is terribly long.— I do so earnestly desire to return, yet I dare hardly look forward to the future, for I do not know what will become of me.— Your situation is above envy; I do not venture even to frame such happy visions.— To a person fit to take the office, the life of a Clergyman is a type of all that is respectable & happy: & if he is a Naturalist & has the “Diamond Beetle”, ave Maria; I do not know what to say.— You tempt me by talking of your fireside, whereas it is a sort of scene I never ought to think about— I saw the other day a vessel sail for England, it was quite dangerous to know, how easily I might turn deserter...



...But if we are not wrecked on some unlucky reef, I will sit by that same fireside in Vale Cottage & tell some of the wonderful stories, which you seem to anticipate & I presume are not very ready to believe. Gracias a dios, the prospect of such times is rather shorter than formerly.—...

God bless you. My very dear Fox. Believe me,

Yours affectionately

Chas. Darwin—



Charles Darwin

Down, Beckenham, Kent.

Gentlemen

For two successive winters the Down School room was lent by Sir John Lubbock, to be employed as a reading room to be open every day but Sunday from 7 to 10 o'clock & no refreshment but tea or coffee to be allowed— For this object he aided by a subscription.

Some respectable newspapers & a few books were provided & a respectable householder was there every evening to maintain decorum. A woman was employed every morning to air & clean the room & put it in order before the school opened—

The end aimed at was to afford some amusement or possible instruction to working men & to give them a comfortable place of assembly without the necessity of resorting to the public house—

The late Vicar Mr Powell appreciated so highly the advantages of such institutions, that he not only subscribed but presented them with a bagatelle board.

The meetings were attended on the average by about 18 persons, & seemed to give great satisfaction, as was proved by the regularity of the payments of 1d a week by the members.

Letter 9122 Charles Darwin to Unidentified [Nov–Dec 1873]

The only objection that we have heard to the employment of the School-room for this purpose is the smell of tobacco remaining in the room until the next morning. As the children must be so well accustomed to this in their confined rooms at home we cannot but think that this would not prove a serious objection, considering the height of the room & the absence of all hangings or furniture.

Under these circumstances we the undersigned hope that you will grant permission for the room to be employed in the same manner as formerly for the months of Dec., Jan., Feb., & March in the ensuing winter

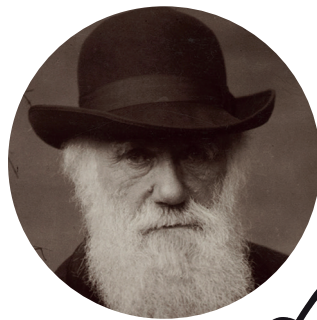
Gentlemen

your obedient servants

Charles Darwin

For

Sir John Lubbock
Ellen Frances Lubbock
S E. Wedgw



Charles Darwin

Letter 12879 Charles Darwin to James Fegan, [Dec 1880 – Feb 1881]

Dear Mr. Fegan,

You ought not to have to write to me for permission to use the Reading Room. You have far more right to it than we have, for your services have done more for the village in a few months than all our efforts for many years. We have never been able to reclaim a drunkard, but through your services I do not know that there is a drunkard left in the village.

Now may I have the pleasure of handing the Reading Room over to you? Perhaps, if we should want it some night for a special purpose, you will be good enough to let us use it.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Darwin.



Charles Darwin

Letter 6486 Charles Darwin to J. B. Innes, 1 December 1868

Dec 1. 68

Dear Innes

I write a line to ask you whether you intend to subscribe this year to the C. & C. [Coal and Clothing club], as we must immediately have our annual meeting. I suppose that Mr Robinson applied to you for your subscription for the Nat. School. - He has suddenly left us to stay for 3 months in Ireland, & as I did not anticipate anything of the kind, I passed over the school account to him, & know nothing about the subscriptions...

As I fully believe that you are anxious to do all the good that you can to your Parish, I am sure you will allow me to say, that unless you can very soon make some fixed arrangement, so that some respectable man may hold the living permanently, great injury will be done here, which it will take years to repair, & what you will consider of importance the Church will be lowered in the estimation of the whole neighbourhood—...

I hope that you will (*illeg*) [reflect] over the state of things in the Parish, & excuse me for frankly telling you the state of things.—



Charles Darwin

Letter questions:

1. In letter 282 Darwin writes to his cousin William Darwin Fox whilst on the *Beagle* voyage. What appeals to Darwin about the life of a clergyman? Why do you think it does at this point in time?
2. From letters 9122 and 12879 we learn of the school house in Darwin's village. What is he asking for it to be used for and why?
3. In letter 6486 Darwin writes to Innes about subscriptions to the Coal and Clothing club, which supplied coal and clothes to villagers through subscription savings (Darwin was treasurer of the club). What does he worry about happening whilst Mr Robinson, curate of the village, is away?
4. What do the letters tell us about Darwin and his role in the community?

Darwin and religion

Who's who?

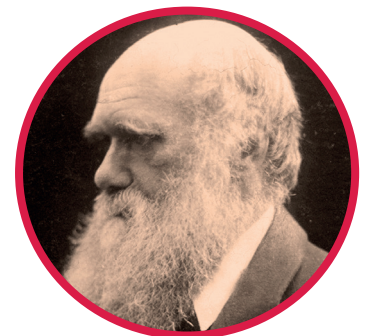
Mary Everest Boole

Mary Everest (1832–1916) was born in Wickwar, Gloucestershire. She was a self-taught mathematician and married fellow mathematician George Boole in 1855. They had 5 daughters but Mary was widowed when she was 32. She supported her children through teaching and writing about maths and science. A committed Christian, Boole wrote to Darwin seeking clarification that his theory might be compatible with her religious faith and was reassured by his response.



Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



Emma Darwin

Emma Darwin (born Wedgwood, 1808–96) was born at the family estate of Maer Hall, Maer, Staffordshire. She was the youngest of seven children and was Charles Darwin's first cousin. She came from a family of Unitarians and freethinkers, and Emma's faith remained important to her. It was something that she explored and discussed with Darwin at length before they married, and on occasion during their married life.



Darwin and religion: Who's who?

James Fegan

James Fegan (1852–1925) was a nonconformist evangelist who opened a number of orphanages for boys. Darwin wrote to him about handing over the village reading room at Downe for his mission work and to thank him for his services to the village.

William Darwin Fox

William Darwin Fox (1805–80) was a clergyman and Charles Darwin's second cousin. He was a good friend of Darwin's at Cambridge and shared his enthusiasm for studying insects. He maintained an active interest in natural history throughout his life and provided Darwin with much information. He was the Rector of Delamere, Cheshire (1838–73) but spent the last years of his life at Sandown, Isle of Wight.



Image: Darwin Correspondence Project / Cambridge University Library CC-BY-ND 2.00

Asa Gray

Asa Gray (1810–88) was an American botanist. He wrote numerous botanical textbooks and works on North American flora. Gray was appointed Professor of Natural History at Harvard University in 1842, a post he held until his death in 1888. He was president of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Darwin began to correspond with him in 1855, exchanging around 300 letters until Darwin's death. Gray was one of Darwin's leading supporters in America. He was also a devout Presbyterian. The longest running and most significant exchange of correspondence for Darwin dealing with the subjects of design in nature and religious belief was with Asa Gray.



Darwin and religion: Who's who?

Thomas Huxley

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95) was a zoologist and professor in natural history. He was appointed naturalist to the Geological Survey of Great Britain in 1855 and was president of the Royal Society of London (1883–5). He was a friend and staunch supporter of Darwin who became known as 'Darwin's bulldog' for his defence of Darwin's ideas.



John Brodie Innes

John Brodie Innes (1817–94) was a clergyman and the perpetual curate of Downe (1846–68). He was born John Innes but was required to change his name in 1861 when he inherited an estate at Milton Brodie in Scotland. He was a friend of Darwin's and they exchanged many letters about community affairs and subsequent vicars at Down. Innes supported Darwin's work, despite not agreeing with everything he wrote.

Leonard Jenyns

Leonard Jenyns (1800–93) was a naturalist and clergyman. Jenyns was vicar of Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire (1828–49). He settled near Bath in 1850 and was founder and first president of the Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club in 1855. He was a member of many scientific societies. He was brother-in-law of John Stevens Henslow (Darwin's botany professor and long-standing friend).



Darwin and religion: Who's who?

Charles Kingsley

Charles Kingsley (1819–75) was an author and clergyman. He was Professor of modern history at Cambridge University from 1860 to 1869. He was Rector of Eversley, Hampshire (1844–75) and Chaplain to the Queen from 1859–75. Kingsley took an active interest in natural history and was a supporter of Darwin's work. He believed that natural selection and natural theology could co-exist if natural selection was seen to operate with a divine purpose.



Adam Sedgwick

Adam Sedgwick (1785–1873) was a geologist and clergyman. He was Woodwardian Professor of geology at Cambridge University for 55 years. He became President of the Geological Society of London and president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a mentor to Darwin and remained in contact for many years.



Image of Charles Kingsley ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 2525. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0