

Views from the Pews: Charles Darwin

Darwin's work – or perhaps we should say others' interpretations of his work – had a huge effect on the Victorian church. And there are still divisions today. Many feel threatened by the science behind evolution, which is important at a time when science informs our response to public health crises.

Need Darwin be a threat?

It might help if we compare him to three people on our banknotes;

1. James Cook said 'I've been to the South Pacific and this is what it looks like'.
2. Ernest Rutherford said 'I've been inside an atom and this is what I saw'.
3. Edmund Hilary reported 'This is what the top of Everest looks like'.

Although Cook's and Rutherford's achievements had all sorts of implications for our world, none of these three are held out as threats to our faith.

It may help therefore to treat Darwin as just another explorer. We know – often from our own experience or from TV and the Internet – that the universe is incredibly complex, and hard to get to grips with. That is probably why we need reporters/explorers like Darwin.

Even better, we could go back to the Book of Genesis and ask ourselves whether its words are maybe even more powerful if we accept them as poetic narratives full of parables, analogy, metaphor, and allusion. We can still distill from Genesis at least two critical propositions, firstly that God is the creator and scriptwriter, and secondly, that caring for creation is a key part of our relationship with God. If we are to care for creation, we need to know as much as possible about it. It may help therefore to look on science as an essential tool for carrying out the tasks God has given us. Do we not use our knowledge of horticulture (a science that flourished in Darwin's day) to keep our Cathedral gardens looking good? Modern hybrids are critical in today's gardens – Darwin is overdue for reconciliation with the whole of Christendom.

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