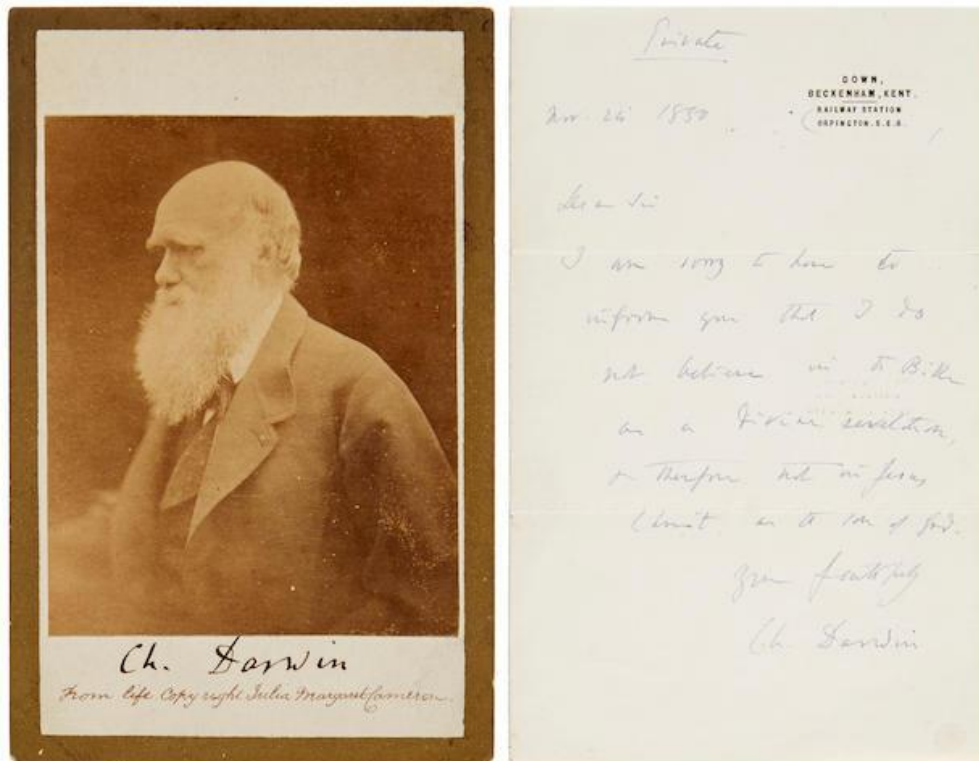


Bonhams

PRESS RELEASE

**(Images on request)
For immediate release**

CHARLES DARWIN'S PRIVATE THOUGHTS ON THE BIBLE AND GOD: A PERSONAL LETTER ON OFFER AT BONHAMS



[L] Charles Darwin, photograph signed ("Ch. Darwin") by Julia Margaret Cameron, 1868.
Est. \$25,000-35,000

[R] Charles Darwin on the Bible, autograph letter signed ("Ch. Darwin")
Charles Darwin (1809-1882)
Est. \$70,000-90,000

New York – A letter handwritten and signed by Charles Darwin features in the History of Science and Technology auction on September 21 in New York. A highly personal and unusually pointed statement on Darwin's lack of belief in the Bible and in Jesus Christ as the son of God, it is estimated at \$70,000-90,000.

Darwin's letter is a reply to a young barrister named Francis McDermott who wrote on November 23, 1880 with a very unusual request: *"...If I am to have pleasure in reading your books I must feel that at the end I shall not have lost my faith in the New Testament. My reason in writing to you therefore is to ask you to give me a Yes or No to the question Do you believe in the New Testament...."* McDermott continues by promising not to publicize Darwin's reply in the "theological papers".

Darwin responded the very next day:

*"Private
Nov. 24 1880
Dear Sir,
I am sorry to have to
inform you that I do
not believe in the Bible
as a divine revelation
& therefore not in Jesus
Christ as the son of God.
Yours faithfully
Ch. Darwin"*

McDermott was true to his word and this letter was unknown to scholars for over 100 years. The subject of Darwin's religiosity is well-known as a cause of vehement debate. The theory of evolution, including the suggestion that humans are descended from apes rather than created in the image of God, is among the most epoch-changing ideas of the modern era.

Darwin himself largely refrained from public comment, probably to respect the feelings of his friends and family. Just a month before penning this note, Darwin wrote to the prominent atheist Edward Aveling, "It has ... been always my object to avoid writing on religion, and I have confined myself to science."

Darwin studied theology at Christ's College, Cambridge beginning in 1828 at the suggestion of his father but was not a particularly diligent student. Darwin preferred to spend his time collecting with a select circle of naturalists. It was Darwin's mentor John Henslow, a clergyman and a professor of Mineralogy at Cambridge, who nominated the 22-year old Darwin for the history-making voyage on the *Beagle*. The theory of evolution began with the research performed on this voyage. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was published in 1859 and it was then that Darwin's faith in religion or lack thereof became the subject of public controversy.

Darwin died in 1882, the greatest naturalist of his age. Rumors of a deathbed conversion were widely believed but firmly denied by his daughter.

Bonhams Director of the History of Science, Cassandra Hatton, commented, "Charles Darwin is unquestionably one of the most influential figures of the modern era, with his theory of evolution sparking perpetual debate. This letter is a symbol of this debate between creationists and the scientific community, which continues to this day."

End

Inquiries

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

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