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Faith, Hope, and Love through Doubt in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*

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Abstract

*In Memoriam* is a poem expressing the journey of Christian faith Alfred Tennyson experiences after the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam. Although Tennyson is submerged in deep sorrow and confronted with questions and challenges to his spiritual beliefs, he becomes a stronger Christian who is filled with faith in a God of love who will reunite him with his departed friend. A careful reading of the poem in comparison with Biblical texts reveals that Tennyson underwent a spiritual transformation that deepened his belief in Christ and the hope of a life after death where he will enjoy the companionship of Hallam once again. Faced with new scientific discoveries coupled with an intense sense of grief over Hallam’s death, Tennyson does doubt and question his faith; however, the end result of the process yielded a deep level of spiritual maturity founded on a transformation of the heart and soul.
In Memoriam is a poem that documents the journey of Christian faith Alfred Tennyson experiences after the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam. Although Tennyson is submerged in deep sorrow and confronted throughout the mourning process with questions and challenges to his spiritual beliefs, he becomes a stronger Christian who is filled with faith in a God of love who will reunite him with his departed friend. There are critics who believe that Tennyson’s faith was not based entirely on Christian principles, yet a careful reading of the text in comparison with Biblical texts reveals that Tennyson underwent a spiritual transformation that deepened his belief in God, in Christ as Lord and Savior, and the hope of a life after death where he will enjoy the companionship of Hallam once again. Faced with new scientific discoveries coupled with an intense sense of grief over Hallam’s death, Tennyson does doubt and question his faith; however, the end result of the process yielded a deep level of spiritual maturity founded on a transformation of the heart and soul—a primary goal of the Christian life based on the literature of the New Testament.

Although some critics feel In Memoriam is not a “distinctly” Christian poem, Tennyson expresses a strong Christian focus and belief throughout the poem. His faith, hope, and love (a summation of Christianity by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians chapter 13) blossomed through the transforming power of doubt while he mourned the loss of his close friend. Since the Bible is the foundation and primary textbook of Christianity, especially the New Testament, comparing the stanzas of In Memoriam with Biblical texts will show that Tennyson had a primarily Christian premise in contrast to what Basil Willey, T.S. Eliot, and others have noted in their criticism of the poem. In an age filled with turmoil and doubt, Tennyson is a voice crying out in the wilderness of societal and spiritual confusion, clinging to faith in the promises of Christianity
that fill his heart and ring true through an intuitive process that is expressed through the medium of poetry.

The Victorian Age—an Era of Doubt and Religious Confusion

From 1833 to 1850, the time period in which In Memoriam was composed, English society was going through a major transitional phase. A largely agrarian economy was being overcome by an industrial revolution. New scientific discoveries were reshaping people’s perspectives on their role in the universe. Bedrock establishments such as the Anglican Church were slow and reluctant to adapt to the changing needs of society and their congregations. Timothy Larsen comments that “...it is more fitting and accurate to describe Christianity in the Victorian age as contested. More precisely, Christianity in nineteenth-century England was strong and pervasive, but it was also forcefully and vehemently attacked from without and given to rancorous disputes between different factions and versions of Christian thought within” (Larsen 2). People of faith needed a solid rock and foundation they could cling to during a time of economic, political, religious, and scientific upheavals, but the Church was filled with division and uncertainty on how to deal with change. Tennyson was one of the rocks who advocated returning to the Lord as the bedrock foundation of their faith: “Our little systems have their day; / They have their day and cease to be: / They are but broken lights of thee, / And thou, O Lord, art more than they” (Prologue 17-20). The “systems” Tennyson refers to cover every humanly devised scheme that seeks to control and bring order to society. This definitely includes religious “systems” as well that are “broken lights” at best of a religion and faith that is based on the “Lord” (Christ), who is far “more than they”—the humanly devised religious prescriptions that people develop to control and wield power over others.
As people were being bounced around by powerful ideological forces, cherished and simplistic beliefs were being challenged, and faith built on superficial frames was being shaken. Philip Davis observes, “Paradoxically, perhaps the most powerful religious phenomenon of the age was religious doubt, the sheer life-seriousness with which the threat of unbelief was experienced by those who could live in ease neither with nor without religion” (Davis 101). Those who believed the world and universe were created in six days a few thousand years before their age were confounded with the idea that the earth’s history extended billions of years into the past. The idea of man being at the center of the universe and God’s crowning accomplishment did not fit well with living beings that were completely extinguished by powerful yet slow moving forces of nature that did not care about the survival of individuals or even entire species. In his book The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture, Jerome Buckley writes: “The Victorians, we are told, were a ‘poor, blind, complacent people;’ yet they were torn by doubt, spiritually bewildered, lost in a troubled universe” (Buckley 2). At a time when people needed stability and reassurance, the Anglican Church was unable to ground people’s faith in the basic tenets of Christianity because they became embroiled in debates on geological timetables and evolutionary enlightenment. Instead of clinging to what it saw as the spiritual truths of the Christian faith, the Church focused too much on potentially marginal issues like the role of evolution in God’s creation of man and the universe.

Since the Anglican Church was not able to meet the spiritual needs of its people in regards to coping with change and adapting to a new world where the role of faith was questioned in lieu of scientific rationalism, other voices needed to rise up and give people the spiritual direction they needed to navigate through the treacherous waters of change. Alan Sinfield observes, “In Tennyson’s time religious debate became general, with the spread of
education, the growth of scientific knowledge and publishing, and the inability of the Anglican Church to cope with the rate of social and demographic change. Engagement with matters of 'faith and doubt' seemed a responsible move for a poet" (Sinfield 57). It is not uncommon for large, well established organizations like the Anglican Church to become sluggish in the face of changing needs and trends. Like the Titanic which was unable to avoid hitting the iceberg due to its inability to turn swiftly, the Church was unable to make quick course corrections to keep the ship moving towards the ultimate goal of fulfilling what it believed to be God's will. Yet Tennyson was not advocating totally dismissing the teachings of the Church or rejecting its authority and organizational structure. Instead, he points out that people have different spiritual needs: "O thou that after toil and storm / Mayest seem to have reach'd a purer air, / Whose faith has centre everywhere, / Nor cares to fix itself to form" (XXXIII 1-4). These stanzas are a good description of Tennyson's approach to his Christian faith. He learns through experience, goes through some "toil and storm," and resists fixing his beliefs "to form." But Tennyson does not reject those people who need an established and structured approach to express their faith: "Leave thou thy sister when she prays, / Her early Heaven, her happy views; / Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse / A life that leads melodious days" (XXXIII 5-8). People who are content with a simplistic faith based on "...the more formal doctrines...learned in childhood" (Gray 27) should not be looked down upon. And Tennyson does not want to harm people's faith with his more thoughtful "honest doubt" and intuitive beliefs. With the upheavals taking place within the Church and society, though, Tennyson shows there are alternative ways people can approach their relationship with God.

As a result of division, the Anglican Church alone became separated into three different entities: The High Church (traditional), the Low Church (evangelical), and the Broad Church
(inclusive). Moreover, in addition to struggles from within the Anglican Church, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Puritans, and many other denominational sects were bickering among one another on the proper path to Christianity, and they all believed their denomination represented God's "church" on earth. Martin Hewitt observes, "...the Victorian 'crisis of faith,' a concept that emerged very clearly in the 1840s, was as much a response to the religious revivals of the early nineteenth century as to external assaults" (Hewitt 422). The Anglican Church was no longer the bedrock establishment who had sole authority on religious issues within English society during the Victorian age. They were being challenged by other denominations and sects with different viewpoints, and the Church as a whole was unable to unite and address the cultural, technological, and scientific shifts taking place within society. A house divided against itself will not stand, and the Church fell prey to "external assaults" because they were not strong and united from within. As a result of the division in the Church, it is not any surprise that it was unwilling and unable to confront the forces of change at work outside its walls.

Poets like Tennyson, on the other hand, immersed themselves in the trends of their time and sought to make sense of all the conflicting forces pulling people in different directions. K.W. Gransden points out the conflict that took place between religion and science on the origin of mankind: "The bitterest intellectual battles of Mid-Victorian England were fought not over political issues but over religious ones. It seemed to some that the biological and geological discoveries of the evolutionists shed a new and doubtful light on man's origin, his role in the universe and his future" (Gransden 7). Rather than sticking to its area of expertise in matters of faith, the Church began debating with scientists on the timing of human beings' appearance here on earth and their role within the creation. By sticking to its six-thousand-year timeframe for mankind, theologians began looking foolish as hard scientific evidence proved that humans have
been around for much longer on a planet that is much older than alluded to within the Bible. Instead of taking a fresh look at scripture based on new evidence from the scientific community, the Church took a closed-minded approach and was unwilling to change their outdated beliefs that were not based on facts and ultimately were irrelevant to matters of faith. Tennyson, on the other hand, does not feel threatened by science. People are much more than “...cunning casts in clay: / Let Science prove we are, and then / What matters Science unto men, / At least to me? I would not stay / ...But I was born to other things” (CXX 5-8, 12). Life is of no use to Tennyson if science is able to prove that humans are strictly mind and body that perish at death. Tennyson does not subscribe to this theory because he has faith and confidence that his life consists of much more than the short time he has been allotted on earth. He was “born to other things” to look ahead to a life that transcends the mental and physical realms.

Many of the Victorian scientists did not realize the impact their findings would have on religious faith. Commenting on reverberations felt within the Christian community due to science’s new discoveries, Carol Christ observes that “although many English scientists were themselves individuals of strong religious convictions, the impact of their scientific discoveries seemed consistently damaging to established faiths” (Christ 986). Scientists like Charles Lyell, who deeply influenced Tennyson’s view of geology, were deeply religious people, and they were not out to suggest Christianity was a hoax. Rather, they were in search of the truth and desired to broaden their understanding of humanity’s role in the natural world. The Church’s unwillingness to accept these truths, though, caused many to question the integrity and authority of the Church. And, the Victorians asked, if the Church is supposed to represent God here on earth, with all the division and confusion within it, is there really a God who is active in His Church and in His creation as a whole when everything appears to be in total chaos?
The question Victorian society needed to address was how would they integrate these new scientific discoveries into their lives and broaden their understanding of mankind within God's creation. Rather than viewing science as an enemy of faith, Tennyson showed how the two should live in harmony with one another: “The love that rose on stronger wings, / Unpalsied when he met with Death, / Is comrade of the lesser faith / That sees the course of human things” (CXXVIII 1-4). Love—the basis of the Christian faith—puts death, faith, and the “course of human things” into proper perspective for Tennyson. Whether mankind was here on earth for several thousand years or several million, the foundational principles of Christianity, Tennyson suggests, do not change based on scientific theories and observations. Alfred Noyes comments, “...it was Tennyson who, when all the religious creeds were crumbling under the assaults of an unjustly incensed science, stood like a rock for certain great fundamental faiths; and—what is more important—he compelled the respect, even of that incensed science, for his restatement of those beliefs” (Noyes 138-9). Tennyson believed, too, that the ultimate answers to the questions facing mankind will come beyond the grave: Death, “That Shadow waiting with the keys” (XXVI 15) and “Who keeps the keys of all the creeds” (XXIII 5), will reveal “the truth of all beliefs” (Gray 21). Of course, Tennyson went through many years of anguish seeking to reconcile science with faith as illustrated in In Memoriam. And Tennyson not only showed the religious community how to incorporate science into their lives; he also helped the scientists to keep their discoveries within the context of spiritual realities as well.

Rather than getting swept away into endless debates that lead nowhere and have no practical benefit for anyone, Tennyson believed that man-made creeds, religion, and theories do not change the inherent relationship people have with their Creator. According to Philip Davis, “…the chastening achievement of In Memoriam is not that it discovers something newer or
better than the Judaeo-Christian faith, but that it renews trust in that faith by finding it again, irreducibly primal and pristine, within a strangely different perspective” (Davis 512). The “strangely different perspective” Davis is referring to is the inherent and intuitive link Tennyson discovers he has with God on an emotional and a spiritual level within the heart. Tennyson taps into this relationship and experience through the medium of poetry, which deals with matters of the heart, mind, and spirit. Tennyson enhances his Christian faith through utilizing his gift and talent as a poet. The conflicts between his heart and mind are worked through and reconciled throughout his *In Memoriam* journey. Within all the complicated formulas and religious doctrine, Tennyson discovers the need to get back to the basics and focus on his belief in what he believed to be the fundamentals of Christianity that do not change no matter how mixed up and chaotic times become. While the Church became embroiled in matters such as the timing of humanity’s arrival here on earth, Tennyson defines the core of Christianity at the foundation of every Christian church: love, faith, humility, service, and a commitment to fulfilling God’s will individually and collectively as a Christian community.

In an era filled with doubts and confusion, Tennyson’s needs were unfilled by the answers he received from the Church and the scientists. Adhering to strict codes of religious conduct and blocking out all forms of dissension from Church doctrine was not the answer. People can only hide behind the walls of the Church for so long before they are forced to face the changes that are needed in their lives and society as a whole. As illustrated during the Victorian age, having a closed-minded approach to any knowledge that conflicts with cherished beliefs limits people from growth and isolates them from their communities. As much as people want to squelch their doubts and run away from problems, Tennyson shows that doubt needs to be faced squarely and dealt with head on. In his work *The Growth of a Poet*, Jerome Buckley observes
that Tennyson fell back on his art and his intuition to increase his faith and live at peace with himself and the changes within his world:

For doubt is merely a philosophic method; and the idol, or the fixed ideal, is essential to the “sensitive mind,” to the artist who must suspend disbelief if he is to achieve aesthetic coherence. Unmoved by the orthodox Anglicanism that rooted its defense in the Evidences and the Natural Theology of Paley, Tennyson was nonetheless suspicious of a faith resting on narrow piety and unreasonable emotion. (Buckley 25)

From Tennyson’s perspective, complying with a set of religious prescriptions and stirring up emotional responses that deceive people into believing they are pleasing God are not sound-minded principles that yield a faith that can weather any storm. Tennyson did not give into disbelief although it could have been an easy thing to do under the circumstances in his life. Although he had doubts and concerns, he worked through those issues and allowed the dust to settle around him to give him a clearer vision on his journey of faith. Although Tennyson was being pulled in multiple directions, he kept his eyes focused on God and did not allow doubt to lead him into permanent despair.

Tennyson did not have plans for solving society’s spiritual issues. In Memoriam was a personal healing process and a medium for confronting and overcoming the conflicting forces at work within his heart and mind. However, as Tennyson worked through these issues, his work also became a source of comfort and inspiration for Queen Victoria, his countrymen, and people far beyond the confines of the British Isles. Cornelius Weygandt comments that “In Memoriam was for years almost a second Bible to many people the English-speaking world over. In America it was looked to by thousands both in and out of the churches as a book of inspired counsel for right living and of solid comfort in the hours of doubt” (Weygandt 114). Tennyson’s struggle was a personal one, yet he paved the way for others to battle and overcome the doubts and uncertainties that are a natural part of human life. It is interesting, too, to consider the other titles Tennyson had in mind for his poem: “...Fragments of an Elegy and The Way of the Soul”
In Memoriam is definitely an elegy and remembrance of his cherished relationship with Arthur Hallam. But, it is much more than that. It is “the way of the soul” for working through the mental, emotional, and spiritual battles to become victorious over the forces of doubt and stand triumphant in a faith based on the teachings of his Lord. In Memoriam is a proper title because the poem focuses on Arthur Hallam. However, The Way of the Soul would have been just as effective because another major focus of the poem is Tennyson’s personal journey towards Christian faith and love.

Critics who Question the Christianity of In Memoriam

Basil Willey’s “Tennyson’s Honest Doubts” is an excellent critical analysis of Tennyson’s journey of faith in In Memoriam. Basil Willey’s thesis is Tennyson obtains faith in his heart from his journey through the grieving process. Willey shows that the faith Tennyson receives goes beyond a narrow, legalistic theological definition of faith. Willey sees the progression of heartfelt faith Tennyson experiences, but he overlooks the Christian experience Tennyson clearly expresses throughout the poem. “In spite of the Prologue, ‘Strong Son of God, immortal Love’...In Memoriam is not a distinctively Christian poem. The doubts, misgivings, probings, and conjectures which make it humanly moving could not have existed in a mind equipped with the Christian solutions” (Willey 81). On the contrary, from Tennyson’s perspective, the questions, struggles, and doubts he expressed are an absolutely normal Christian experience of grappling with life’s tougher issues of death, the afterlife, and those who are left behind to face a difficult world filled with conflict and pain. Willey thinks Tennyson’s faith “…goes behind Christianity, or passes it by, confronting the preliminary question which besets the natural man, the question whether there can be any religious interpretation of life at all” (Willey 81). While Tennyson has religious teachings, new scientific theories, and emotional
turmoil churning through his soul after Hallam’s death, he works through the confusion and doubts to arrive at a sincere Christian faith in the end. In his defense, what Willey likely had in mind when he refers to “Christian” is Christianity as defined by some within the Church—following a strict code and creed of religious conformance. In this case, yes, Tennyson goes beyond the limited and narrow perspective some theologians tended to have towards the Christian faith. Nevertheless, it is clear throughout the poem that Tennyson’s focus was clearly on Christ, who is the true basis and definition for who is and who is not a “Christian” based on the Bible—the foundational source of Christian teachings regardless of denominational differences. If Tennyson’s faith as expressed in In Memoriam correlates with the teachings of Christ, then Tennyson is a Christian because he is a disciple and follower of his Lord.

Other critics besides Willey have questioned whether Tennyson’s faith could be classified as Christian. T. S. Eliot, for example, comments that Tennyson’s beliefs were unorthodox: “He was desperately anxious to hold the faith of the believer, without being very clear about what he wanted to believe: he was capable of illumination which he was incapable of understanding. The ‘Strong Son of God, immortal Love,’...has only a hazy connexion with the Logos, or the Incarnate God” (Eliot 197). The faith and beliefs Tennyson expresses throughout In Memoriam do not come from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, the teachings he learned in Sunday school, or from his father who was a minister. Tennyson’s faith comes through his personal struggles with doubt—he learned through experience versus accepting faith at face value. Eliot’s most famous observation on Tennyson’s poem shows how doubt is much more prevalent than faith from Eliot’s perspective: “In Memoriam can, I think, justly be called a religious poem, but for another reason than that which made it seem religious to his contemporaries. It is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the quality of
its doubt. Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience” (Eliot 200-1). Rather than fighting off the forces of doubt through adhering to the faith he was taught while growing up, Tennyson immerses himself in doubt to work his way through the darkness and into the light. Eliot acknowledges that Tennyson is “religious” in *In Memoriam*, but he does not acknowledge that Tennyson wrote the poem from a Christian perspective. Commenting on T.S. Eliot’s observation that Tennyson’s faith is a poor thing as expressed in the poem, Cecil Lang says, “The terms ought to be reversed. Its doubt now seems old fashioned...its faith modern; its doubt quaint, its faith fresh; its doubt (though not the less ‘a very intense experience’) a historical curiosity, its faith a living force—and not less vivid because not Anglo-Catholic” (Lang xxxv). Tennyson did not follow all of the standards of the Church for being a faithful disciple. And the observations from both Eliot and Lang illustrate the different opinions people have on the role of doubt and faith within a Christian’s life. There is no doubt in any of these critics’ minds on the religious nature of *In Memoriam*, and the question goes much deeper than whether Tennyson was a sincere member of the Anglican Church. The debate is over Tennyson’s Christianity in general and the Christian focus and faith expressed within the poem. Tennyson confronts his doubts and works his way through them in a way that best meets his needs rather than applying a textbook and doctrinally approved methodology for being a faithful Christian as defined by the Church. As much as people desire to have a magic formula that solves all of their problems such as saying, “If you have doubts, they need to be rejected because they are from the Devil,” everybody has unique personalities and backgrounds, and Tennyson needed to discover the best way for him to cope with grief, doubt, and other problems he faced that challenged his core Christian beliefs.
Following the teachings of the Church for coping with change and living a happy life do not work for everyone. As Tennyson illustrates within *In Memoriam*, just because somebody is not in compliance with Church doctrine and teaching does not mean he or she is not Christian. In *The Growth of a Poet*, Jerome Buckley says, “…*In Memoriam* is seldom specifically Christian. Tennyson goes behind the dogmas of his own broad Anglicanism to discover the availability of any religious faith at all and finally to establish subjective experience as sufficient ground for a full assent to the reality of God and the value of the human enterprise” (Buckley 127). Along the same lines, A.C. Benson comments, “With every wish to find a definite Christian faith expressed in *In Memoriam* I must confess that I cannot certainly discover it there, though the poem is of course instinct with strong Christian feeling throughout” (Benson 173). All of these critics have valid points. As one looks at *In Memoriam* and Tennyson’s personal faith in general, it is not in compliance with some of the orthodox teachings of the Church. And, if Anglicanism or any other denominational organization represents Christianity exclusively, then yes, Tennyson strays from being a “Christian” in his approach to Hallam’s loss, new scientific revelations, and the personal doubts and misgivings he experiences. However, if Tennyson develops a closer and more intimate relationship with the Lord through his troubles, he is still a Christian because he is following the teachings of Christ and accepts Him as his Lord—once again, the Bible is the ultimate authority that addresses and answers this question. The poem is filled with examples and allusions that represent faith based on Christian beliefs and principles. If history has proven one thing related to the Christian Church, it is that no one denomination can claim to have exclusive rights to the promises and revelations of God. All human organizations are subject to inaccuracies and corruption. And, individuals also have varying perceptions and preferences on what it means to be a Christian, but as long as the core foundation is in place, Christ, there is
room for variety and choices in worship and lifestyle such as the choices Tennyson makes in his faith and relationship with his Lord. Christ teaches that God does not want robots. He wants relationships. All of these things are important to keep in mind as one reads *In Memoriam* and looks at Tennyson's religious perceptions and his struggle with doubt and science's role in society and in issues dealing with faith.

Some contemporary critics do not challenge Tennyson’s Christianity outright. In fact, it is an issue that is not addressed at all, or it is looked at as a marginal issue within the poem in recent critical history. This is shocking considering how prevalent the Christian imagery is in *In Memoriam*. William Wilson comments, “Victorian and contemporary readers generally treat the elegy’s hopefulness as real, despite these paradoxes [the apparent “contradictions in the poem”]. They uncritically accept Tennyson’s dominant self-representation, which seems more a product of Victorian ideology than one convincingly achieved in the elegy” (Wilson 42). Wilson does not grasp the realization that resolution can be achieved amidst paradox and conflicting influences. Just because Tennyson does not present a final “solution” to his grief and loss does not mean he is not able to achieve a sense of resolution and peace within the poem. John Rosenberg seems to question Tennyson’s sincerity as well through making the statement, “Christianity held out the hope of eternal life, and hence of his ultimate reunion with Arthur Hallam. And so Tennyson, however beset by doubt, was a Christian” (Rosenberg 308). On the surface, Rosenberg seems to acknowledge that Tennyson was a Christian. But one implication of his comment is Tennyson was a Christian because Christianity offers the hope of eternal life and, therefore, the hope of Tennyson being reunited with Hallam once again. So despite Tennyson’s doubts, he was a Christian because it presents the potential for Tennyson to be with his friend forever. The “hope of eternal life” is a motivating promise for Tennyson, but Tennyson’s Christianity is based on
much more than that. Looking at In Memoriam and Tennyson’s life as a whole shows that he was a Christian because his faith and beliefs were tied into the teachings of Christ in the New Testament of the Bible.

**Alfred Tennyson—A Genuine Christian with “Honest Doubts”**

As much as some try to rationalize a secular motivation to Tennyson’s In Memoriam experience, comments from Tennyson and his son within A Memoir illustrate that Tennyson wrote the poem from a Christian point of view. Tennyson’s son commented on his father’s focus on life: “Everywhere throughout the Universe, he saw the glory and greatness of God, and the science of Nature was particularly dear to him” (H. Tennyson 312). Interestingly, Tennyson’s interest in science was not at odds with his belief in God. Moreover, Tennyson himself makes it very clear that In Memoriam is a journey of Christian faith and love:

> It must be remembered...that this is a poem, not an actual biography. It is founded on our friendship, on the engagement of Arthur Hallam to my sister, on his sudden death at Vienna, just before the time fixed for their marriage, and on his burial at Clevedon Church. The poem concludes with the marriage of my youngest sister Cecilia. It was meant to be a kind of Divina Commedia, ending with happiness.... The different moods of sorrow as in a drama are dramatically given, and my fear, doubt, and suffering will find answer and relief only through Faith in a God of Love. (H. Tennyson 304-305)

The “Divina Commedia” is another Christian reference as Tennyson compares his work to Dante’s Divine Comedy. It is striking that Tennyson wrote this summary in such a “matter of fact” tone. One gets the sense that the pain of Hallam’s loss is still difficult for Tennyson to face, and this is a clear example that shows how people never fully get over the loss of loved ones. Sure, acceptance, healing, and the ability to “move on with his life” came to Tennyson as time progressed; however, Hallam’s death touched and transformed his life and strengthened the faith Tennyson had in a God who loved him. Tennyson made it very clear in his commentary that his doubt and suffering were answered and relieved by “Faith in a God of Love,” specifically the Christian God referred to in the Bible as a God of love (I John 4: 8-9).
Tennyson told his son, “My most passionate desire is to have a clearer and fuller vision of God” (H. Tennyson 320-321). *In Memoriam* is an expression of Tennyson’s desire to strengthen his relationship with God by having a better understanding of his Christian faith in the context of the turmoil that he suffered personally and the chaos he witnessed in the natural world and human society in general. Tennyson’s son sums up his father’s poem very well: “For in *In Memoriam*, the soul, after grappling with anguish and darkness, doubt and death, emerges with the inspiration of a strong and steadfast faith in the love of God for man, and in the oneness of man with God, and of man with man in Him” (H. Tennyson 327). Love is the glue that binds Tennyson with Hallam and both men with God. Although separated by death, Tennyson gains a sense of unity with Hallam, and he looks forward to the “oneness” they will ultimately have with God and each other in heaven. According to Eugene August, Tennyson saw “…love as the spiritual energy that moves creation toward its new birth” (August 224). Tennyson believed the love of God would bring new life to the physical “creation” through evolution and eternal life to mankind after death.

There are a multitude of passages within the poem that show how highly Tennyson valued love and the faith he had in his Christian beliefs. To capture the depth of sorrow he felt over Hallam’s death, Tennyson references the remembrance in the Gospels of Mary Magdalene’s love for her Lord: “All subtle thought, all curious fears, / Borne down by gladness so complete, / She bows, she bathes the Saviour’s feet / With costly spikenard and with tears” (XXXII 9-12). Mary was one of the few who knew and accepted Jesus’ death was coming, and she loved and appreciated the grace and forgiveness she received from her Lord. Mary was willing to humble and abase herself to express her love for Christ. Similarly, Tennyson abases himself before Hallam and God to express his heartfelt grief and love for both. Tennyson acknowledges the
depth of Mary’s love, and desires to express that kind of affection and faithfulness to God as well. Tennyson also specifically refers to Christ as the Savior—another clear distinction of his Christian faith and focus throughout the poem. Tennyson continues, “Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers, / Whose loves in higher love endure; / What souls possess themselves so pure, / Or is there blessedness like theirs” (XXXII 13-16). Tennyson wonders what it takes to achieve a “blessedness” in love on the same plane as saints like Mary Magdalene. This is a plane Tennyson seeks to achieve throughout the poem. As he continues with his In Memoriam journey, Tennyson learns that it is only through Christ that the highest level of self-sacrificing, Godly love can be achieved:

O living will that shalt endure
   When all that seems shall suffer shock,
   Rise in the spiritual rock,
   Flow thro’ our deeds and make them pure,

   That we may lift from out of the dust
   A voice as unto him that hears,
   A cry above the conquer’d years
   To one that with us works, and trust,

   With faith that comes of self-control,
   The truths that never can be proved
   Until we close with all we loved,
   And all we flow from, soul in soul. (CXXXI 1-12)

The “spiritual rock” referred to is Jesus Christ: “…For they (Israel) drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (I Cor. 10: 4). Tennyson realizes that he needs Christ to “flow thro’” his heart to make him pure and express the faith and love he needs to look forward to a resurrection from the dead and trust in “truths” that cannot be proved by science and human reason alone. Sorrow, self-control, suffering, and even doubt all produce a faith that love will create oneness between Tennyson, Hallam, and their God. The critic, A.C. Benson, comments, “There is no allusion in the whole poem to the Resurrection, the cardinal belief of Christianity, the very foundation-stone of Christian belief; the very essence of consolation, of
triumph over death, of final victory. It is impossible that one who was a Christian in the strictest sense should not have recurred again and again to this though in a poem which deals from first to last with death and hope” (Benson 177-8). Benson overlooks, however, the implications Tennyson makes towards the fact that Christ did rise from the dead. For example, Tennyson talks about rising in the “spiritual rock,” Christ, and Tennyson asks Him to “Flow thro’ our deeds and make them pure” (CXXXI 4). If Christ did not rise from the dead and is not seated at the right hand of God as an intercessor for mankind in Tennyson’s mind as Benson claims, then why would Tennyson ask his Lord to come into his heart and purify his deeds? The fact that Christ is alive in Tennyson’s eyes as referred to in several areas of the poem implies the resurrection as well (see sections Prologue, LXXXIV, CXXVI, and CXXXI for examples). In contrast to Benson’s observation, Michael Wheeler says, “Tennyson’s belief in a life after death, for him the ‘cardinal point of Christianity’, was grounded in belief in a God of love (reflected, for example, to his response to Dante in In Memoriam) and a hope for ‘the Christ that is to be’ (reflected in the Johannine emphasis upon incarnation in the poem)” (Wheeler 223). From a Christian point of view, life after death is only possible through a resurrection, and a resurrection is only made possible through Christ, who suffered and died for humanity’s sins and rose from the dead as the “…firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8: 29).

Another aspect of In Memoriam that illustrates Tennyson’s Christian perspective is the references to the three Christmases, which play a crucial role in the healing process and the transition from doubt to faith. If Tennyson had some universal perspective towards God and faith in general, why do the Christmases play such a crucial role in the poem? Erik Gray observes, “The poem’s framework is distinctly Christian: its time scheme, for instance—the three years of mourning—is marked out by the recurrence of Christmas at regular intervals” (Gray xxi). Yes,
there are doubts and there is mourning, but the birth of Christ comes around within the poem on
regular intervals to remind Tennyson that a Savior was born, and humanity has hope in Him. In
his work *In Memoriam, Maud, and Other Poems*, John Jump points out the role the Christmases
play within the poem and Tennyson’s spiritual recovery: “Its three Christmas passages, implying
a fictional span of almost exactly three years between the opening and the close, can be read as
marking clear stages in the mourner’s emotional and spiritual recovery: the first Christmas Eve
falls ‘sadly’ (xxx), the second ‘calmly’ (lxxviii), and the third ‘strangely’” (Jump cv). Christmas
is a season of joy, but when one has lost a loved one, it can be a sad experience as well because
the dead are no longer able to participate in the Christmas experience, and their presence is
sorely missed. Also, even the first Christmas was filled with both joy and sorrow. The Savior of
the world was born, yet shortly after that birth, the madman, King Herod, had many children put
to death in an attempt to kill the Messiah. The first Christmas was a time of great sorrow for
many families in Israel (Matt. 2: 13-18). As time goes on, though, the healing process and a
measure of acceptance occur. Strangely, life ultimately progresses without loved ones as
Tennyson experiences. Even though they are still missed, people move on in faith knowing they
will see their lost loved ones again, and they need to get on with their lives and be productive
members of society—it is a psychological coping mechanism as well. It is also important to note
that Tennyson did not look at Christmas from a secular perspective as many do as a holiday for
families to get together and exchange gifts exclusively. He specifically refers to Christmas as
“...the birth of Christ” (XXVIII 1). Referring to Tennyson’s perspective after the third
Christmas, A.C. Bradley comments, “Throughout the part, even when the poet is thinking of the
past, he is looking forward into the future. Regret is passing away, but love is growing and
widening” (Bradley 34). Sorrow and doubt are replaced by love and faith because Tennyson
believes in the promises of Christianity to reunite loved ones and make things right ultimately for God’s people and His creation.

The Epilogue and Prologue of *In Memoriam* are very clear that Tennyson had Christianity in mind as he composed the poem. One has a sense of wholeness in reading the ending and beginning of the poem. All of the sadness, confusion, and questioning that happens in between these two sections of *In Memoriam* seem irrelevant on the whole as unity, peace, and love are the final answer to all suffering and pain. The Omega who promises to wipe every tear from His children’s eyes is the same One who will make everything right in the end: “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The ending and beginning of the story for humanity, as in Tennyson’s poem, are the same.

The imagery of Cecilia’s marriage in the Epilogue is a foreshadowing of the ultimate marriage of the bride of Christ, God’s people, being married and made one with the Bridegroom, Jesus. Eugene August wrote, “Only in the Epilogue does [Tennyson] equate Omega with a Christ who is both the historical Jesus and the cosmic Person toward whom the whole creation moves” (August 223). The end justifies the means, and God’s final purpose for humanity in Tennyson’s eyes is having a unifying and loving relationship for all eternity. After being beaten up and suffering immensely, the end result for Tennyson is not bitterness: “yet is love not less, but more” (Epilogue 12). Doubt yields faith, sorrow reaps joy, despondency leads to hope, and hatred harnesses love: “For I myself with these have grown / To something greater than before; / Which makes appear the songs I made / As echoes out of weaker times, / As half but idle brawling rhymes, / The sport of random sun and shade” (Epilogue 19-24). Tennyson became a stronger and more joyful Christian through the death of his beloved friend: “That friend of mine
who lives in God, / That God, which ever lives and loves, / One God, one law, one element, / And one far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves” (Epilogue 140-144).

Oneness with Hallam, with the Creator, and with all of creation is the Omega that Tennyson bases his faith, hope, and love upon.

Tennyson’s faith was not some universal abstraction of God or spirituality in general. Tennyson was a deeply converted, Christian man who used the medium of poetry as a way of expressing his beliefs. According to Tennyson’s son, “His creed, he always said, he would not formulate, for people would not understand him if he did; but he considered that his poems expressed the principles at the foundation of his faith” (H. Tennyson 308-9). In Memoriam is filled with Christian imagery and expresses a Christian faith that has been internalized and written indelibly within his heart. Arthur Tennyson also notes, “The main testimony to Christianity he found not in miracles but in the eternal witness, the revelation of what might be called ‘The Mind of God,’ in the Christian morality, and its correlation with the divine in man. He had a measureless admiration for the Sermon on the Mount; and for the Parables—‘perfection, beyond compare,’ he called them” (H. Tennyson 325). Tennyson discovered a true revelation of God in Christianity, and his faith and beliefs came from key Christian teachings such as the “Sermon on the Mount” and Jesus’ parables. Tennyson believed that Christianity is not contained within man-made denominational constraints; it is based on having a relationship with the Lord. K.W. Gransden says, “When Tennyson personifies God it is usually as Christ and usually periphrastically as ‘He that died in Holy Land’…” (Gransden 58). Tennyson refers to Christ often within In Memoriam, and his Christianity is expressed throughout the poem as a means through which he overcomes doubt and learns to cope with the loss of Hallam.

Tennyson’s son says, “…my father expressed his conviction that ‘Christianity with its divine
Morality but without the central figure of Christ, the Son of Man, would become cold, and that it is fatal for religion to lose its warmth” (H. Tennyson 325-6). Christ was an important and central part of Tennyson’s faith and religious convictions. Tennyson focuses in on Jesus’ humanity and Christ’s divinity.

Tennyson reflected the core teachings of Christ in his writings. Although he may not have been in total compliance with certain Church teachings, Tennyson was in line with the foundational principles of Christianity as outlined in the New Testament. According to Arthur Tennyson, his father said, “Almost the finest summing up of Religion is ‘to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God’” (H. Tennyson 316). Tennyson quotes Micah 6: 8 as a summation of true religion, and Jesus himself describes this as “the weightier matters of the law” (Matt. 23: 23). Ultimately, the core of Christianity is based on love. Faith, justice, humility, and every other important Christian characteristic are tied into the love of God. Tennyson said, “The love of God is the true basis of duty, truth, reverence, loyalty, love, virtue and work” (H. Tennyson 318). Tennyson realizes that without love, everything else is meaningless and futile (I Cor. 13: 1-3). He says outright in the poem, “Love is and was my Lord and my King” (CXXVI 1). Tennyson’s focus on the love of God ties in with the primary teaching of Christ. When Christ was asked what the greatest commandment in the law is, he responded: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt: 22: 37-40). The heart and core of Christianity is the love of God (I Cor. 13: 13). Tennyson believes in this tenet, and In Memoriam is a testament of Christian love more than anything else. Tennyson loves Hallam. It is
really as simple as that, and this love is a divine love that transcends the confines of human love, emotions, and reason.

_In Memoriam_ definitely ends on a promising, faith-based note. Tennyson found comfort and strength in the promise of God’s love for him and humanity. According to Eugene August, “For Tennyson, love is ultimately a Person—Christ in the Prologue, God in the Epilogue” (August 225). Tennyson sees the majesty of God, who is all-powerful and has complete control of creation and mankind’s destiny. Tennyson also sees Christ, who became human to suffer and die to reconcile people with God and bring healing to the earth and the universe as a whole. The Prologue lays the foundation for the entire poem—a foundation that is built on the love of Christ for humans. “Throughout _In Memoriam_ itself, Tennyson focuses on Hallam, but the figure of Christ is always present in the background” (August 225). The teachings of Christ brought purpose to Tennyson’s life in a world that seemed futile and hopeless. Tennyson’s son said that “When questions were asked [of his father] about Christ, he would say to me: ‘Answer for me that I have given my belief in _In Memoriam_’” (H. Tennyson 325). Tennyson makes it very clear throughout the poem that Jesus is an important part of his life, and it is not any accident or coincidence that he begins the poem focusing on Christ.

Why did Tennyson compose the Prologue last and place it at the beginning of _In Memoriam_? He wanted to make it deliberately clear that although the reader was going to be traveling with him on a journey filled with doubt, questions, and sadness, Tennyson’s focus and faith were in the promises of his Lord to be with him through thick and thin. “And so the Word had breath, and wrought / With human hands the creed of creeds / In loveliness of perfect deeds, / More strong than all poetical thought” (XXXVI 9-12). The “Word” is Christ (John 1: 14). Tennyson makes it very clear that the “creed of creeds” has come from Christ, who is the basis
of Tennyson’s faith and religion. Eugene August says, “The Prologue to In Memoriam, written last, is the most openly Christian part of the poem, yet it too shies away from a sectarian Christianity and points instead to a Christ who is both personal and cosmic” (August 223).

Tennyson does not look at Christ from an institutionalized or denominational perspective. Rather than conforming strictly to the teachings of Anglicanism, he sees his Lord as a friend and guide, someone who he had a relationship with. Christianity is more of a relationship than it is a religion to Tennyson. Eugene August writes, “Tennyson’s Christ is larger than the ‘little systems’ of nineteenth-century sectarianism can picture” (August 224). By referring to Christ as the “Word,” Tennyson is showing that his view of Christ is far more than a human who had wise religious teachings. The Word is the creator of heaven and earth, eternal, and the God of Old Testament times who became flesh and blood to suffer, die, and be resurrected to redeem his creation from the bondage of sin (John 1: 1-18). Tennyson believes all humanly designed creeds are ultimately subject to the creeds of Christ, or they are irrelevant and meaningless. John Shad writes:

This capacity is inscribed, once again, within the poem’s incarnational premise by which language is conceived of as both feminine (‘loveliness’) and fact, or material (‘deed’): ‘The Word,’ we read, ‘wrought / ...the creed of creeds / In loveliness of perfect deeds’ (36. 9-11). However, the notion of a discourse that is at once feminine and material is most precisely inscribed in the Prayer Book definition of the church as both ‘the spouse and body of Christ’—in other words, as the Word made feminine flesh. (Shad 182)

Language is an intimate instrument for Tennyson. He uses poetry to express his deepest thoughts and feelings and connects with the concept of Christ as the Word (Logos) of God. And the imagery of the Church being the body and bride of Christ shows the unity between God and His people. The Word connects heaven and earth to Tennyson, who uses the language and dialog of poetry to relay his love towards God and his love for Hallam. The “creed of creeds” has come from the Word whose focus is love and relationships. Simply put by Christ, Christianity’s focus
is developing a relationship of love with God and other people (Mark 12: 29-31). Tennyson loves God, and he definitely has love for others as he expresses for his beloved friend, Hallam.

The first few stanzas of the poem should disintegrate any shadow of a doubt that Tennyson was writing from a Christian perspective: “Strong Son of God, immortal Love, / Whom we, that have not seen thy face, / By faith, and faith alone, embrace, / Believing where we cannot prove; Thine are these orbs of light and shade (Prologue 1-5). Tennyson sums up the purpose of the poem right in the beginning by summarizing his Christian beliefs: Love, faith, and unity (“embrace”). “Thou seemest human and divine, / The highest, holiest manhood, thou: / Our wills are ours, we know not how; / Our wills are ours, to make them thine” (Prologue 13-16). Jesus Christ was both man and God, and Tennyson understands that to follow his Savior meant dedicating his life to doing God’s will. “Forgive my grief for one removed, / Thy creature, whom I found so fair. / I trust he lives in thee, and there / I found him worthier to be loved” (Prologue 37-40). Tennyson asks for forgiveness for his sadness at the loss of Hallam because it could be perceived as a lack of faith. In contrast, Tennyson expresses his true feelings, works through the grief by God’s strength, and has hope in a life after death where union with God and Hallam will make everything right in the end. Tennyson expresses within the Prologue:

Our little systems have their day;
    They have their day and cease to be;
    They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith: we cannot know;
    For knowledge is of things we see;
    And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow. (Prologue 17-24)

Tennyson understands that any humanly devised systems are limited and will ultimately perish and be replaced. The best humanity can do is mimic or create slight representations of the truth because of man’s fallen state. The “Lord” stands above any humanly devised creeds and systems.
Tennyson’s faith lies in Christ. In lines 21-24, Tennyson is paraphrasing the definition of faith as best expressed in Hebrews 11: 1, “Now faith is the substance [realization] of things hoped for, the evidence [confidence] of things not seen.” Faith comes from Christ, and Tennyson asks his Lord to “let it grow” within him. In addition, Tennyson looks ahead to the return of his King and the establishment of His millennial reign here on earth: “Ring in the thousand years of peace...Ring in the Christ that is to be” (CVI 28, 32). Yes, Tennyson is looking ahead to the broader Christianity of the future (Gray 81) but, more specifically, he is looking ahead to Christ returning here to earth as “King of kings” and “Lord of lords” (“the Christ that is to be”) to bring peace and justice to the earth during His millennial reign (“the thousand years of peace”) as He rules with righteousness and love over humanity (Rev. 17: 14; Rev. 19: 11-21, 20: 1-15; Isa. 9: 6-7).

**Scientific Discoveries and Their Impact on Religious Faith**

Tennyson was well versed in the scientific discoveries of his age, and it is apparent within the poem that he struggled to reconcile these with Christian faith. Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* journey illustrates how the death of a loved one forces a person to confront the purpose of life and whether there is more to this existence than what one sees. Tennyson did not come to faith through knowledge, logic, or observing the natural world in action. It was a spiritual experience and process that took place within his heart. Basil Willey says Tennyson “…felt (or came to feel) that the whole spectacle of Nature was somehow irrelevant to faith” (Willey 85). Whereas many Christians were shaken by new theories in Geology and Biology that challenged their timetable on the creation of the earth and the role of man in the overall scheme of life, Tennyson came to believe that science was not at conflict with spiritual realities in his life. Willey continues, “it may be, that, while we are committed to take our chance in a natural
system of undeviating operation...there is a system of Mercy and Grace behind the screen of
nature, which is to make up for all the casualties endured there...” (Willey 88). Science is limited
to measuring and observing laws at work in the physical realm that the five natural senses are in
tune with. However, many scientists of Tennyson’s age also believed there is a spiritual element
at work behind the scenes that cannot be explained by logic and scientific principles. Spiritual
concepts such as mercy and grace cannot be measured and quantified by the scientific method.

Willey uses several passages within the poem to support his premise that Tennyson loses
faith in Christian promises in lieu of the operation and laws of the natural world: “nature seems to
deny the law of love, and man is...‘a prospective fossil.’ After faintly trusting the larger hope,
Tennyson sinks to even dimmer depths of perplexity; hope seems to vanish, truth is forever hidden behind the veil...” (Willey 91). Another interpretation of the passages Willey cites shows that just the opposite has occurred for Tennyson: scientific revelations and observing the natural world that seems to conflict with religious teachings and the nature of God actually causes
Tennyson to reach out in faith and hold on to hope in the midst of controversy and doubt:

Are God and Nature then at strife,
    That Nature lends such Evil dreams?
    So careful of the type she seems,
    So careless of the single life;

    That I, considering everywhere
        Her secret meaning in her deeds,
        And finding that of fifty seeds
        She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
    And falling with my weight of cares
    Upon the great world’s altar-stairs
    That slope thro’ darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
    And gather dust and chaff, and call
    To what I feel is Lord of all,
    And faintly trust the larger hope. (LV 5-20)
Yes, Tennyson is troubled by the vastness and complexity of this world and saw how insignificant he is. Nature does not give him any comfort that God cares about people any more than He does the seed that falls to the ground unfruitfully. Understanding his mortality and how in one sense he is no different from the one small seed of fifty that survives in this world, Tennyson reaches for God and the "larger hope" the Christian faith promises in a life after death. Faith and hope are "faint" at this point of Tennyson's journey, but it is still present. Yes, he gropes and faintly trusts the "larger hope"; nevertheless, he is not going to let go of his faith completely at this point in his life because he still senses God's presence in his life: "I stretch lame hands of faith...and call / To what I feel is Lord of all." Tennyson's faith seems lame, yet he still reaches out to God because his internal senses are telling him to not give up hope. Science certainly does not give Tennyson any comfort or hope that he will one day be reunited with Hallam:

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law—
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed—

Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of their prime,
That tare each other in their slime,
Were mellow music match'd with him.

O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil. (LV I 13-28)

God's nature of love appears to be in conflict with areas of the natural world where survival of the fittest determines who lives and who perishes. Will man suffer the same fate as past species like the dinosaurs that are "seal'd within the iron hills" as mere fossils and remnants of an extinct
species that is no longer relevant? “Futile” and “frail” are great descriptions of man’s fate if this short existence is all people have to hope for. Tennyson longs to hear Hallam’s voice of reassurance that futility does not define the human experience. Commenting on these crucial stanzas within section LVI, Devon Fisher writes:

The profound fear that human life in general and Hallam’s life specifically amount to little more than a heap of dust engenders nothing but discordant noise, yet even in the face of this doubt, Tennyson continues to turn to Hallam as evidence of something higher. ‘O for thy voice to soothe and bless!’ (56: 26), he writes; the desire—still unfilled, perhaps—for Hallam’s voice to lend harmony to discord caused by Nature becomes Tennyson’s reason for proceeding. (Fisher 229)

At this point of the poem, Tennyson’s hope that Hallam’s voice has not been extinguished for all eternity gives Tennyson some reassurance that not everything has been lost and life has some purpose to it. The context of these verses also suggests, as Fisher observes, the “voice” Tennyson longs to hear is Hallam’s, not God’s—Tennyson’s faith is pretty fragile at this point of the journey where he sees how frail and futile human life is and how brutal and unforgiving nature can be. Ultimately, though, Tennyson must wait in faith for the answers that will come “behind the veil” of death, “who keeps the keys of all the creeds” (XXIII 5). Tennyson believes all the controversies within religion and science about life after death will only be revealed and answered when the veil is lifted after death. Tennyson has hope that the answers to the crazy conditions of this world will be given after death, and although nature can be bloody and ruthless, Tennyson, however faintly at this point, trusts there is a God of love out there, and His law and nature of love will ultimately prevail.

By writing, “Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation’s final law— / Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek’d against his creed” (LVI 13-16), Tennyson asks the question: if God is a God of love and mercy, why is His creation so violent and merciless in many ways? The lion that stalks his prey and pounces with violent force to tear the flesh and bowels for his bloody meal does not represent love. The feeding frenzy of a school of
sharks seems totally contradictory to a Christian God whose creation is supposed to represent his nature and character. Tennyson likely had the following verse from the New Testament in mind as he struggles with this dilemma: "For since the creation of the world His (God’s) invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (divine nature)..." (Rom. 1: 20). If nature is in part representative of God’s divine nature, Tennyson reasons, then God is a stalking, bloodthirsty, ruthless predator in part.

Tennyson realizes, though, that looking at the physical world exclusively will not lead one to a full relationship with God. According to Eleanor Mattes, "...Tennyson was seeking refuge in the position that the so called realities of the physical world hide as much as they reveal of the truth, which man can have full access to only at death, when the ‘veil’ of finite, mortal limitations is withdrawn” (Mattes 60-1). The mortal perspective is a limited one—humans “...see in a mirror, dimly” (I Cor. 13: 12)—and Tennyson accepts the fact that all of the debates and questions regarding God’s plan and purpose will not be fully revealed in this life; those answers will come “behind the veil.” In the mean time, Tennyson must struggle to reconcile new scientific discoveries with his faith. Robert Hass explains that conflicts are inevitable when seemingly contradictory theories and ideas clash within a thoughtful person’s mind like Tennyson’s:

For Tennyson, however, the question of the soul became increasingly problematic in the face of the new science. Nature, which Enlightenment scientists had once perceived as a window to the divine, was now perceived by many to be hostile and indifferent to the species for whom it was supposedly created. With such opposing views operating upon Tennyson’s imagination, his vacillation between doubt and faith was almost inevitable. (Hass 675)

It was natural for Tennyson to question his faith in light of new information and knowledge. An example of the mixed feelings of doubt and faith Tennyson expresses comes through the stanzas,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world’s altar-stairs
That slope thro’ darkness up to God,
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
The words "falter, firmly, faintly" are all intermixed together. Tennyson is in a spiritual dilemma—he has been knocked to the ground by Death and an onslaught of new scientific knowledge, yet he refuses to give up total hope as he stretches his hands to heaven. "Dust and chaff" represent human mortality, and Tennyson realizes that without the hope of life eternal through the promises of Christianity, his mortal life will one day be extinguished forever. If one believes God is a merciful and omniscient God who cares for and knows when every sparrow dies and even knows the number of hairs each living person has, the truth that entire species have been wiped out is very disconcerting to a person like Tennyson who wants to feel comforted that his life is important and God cares about him. Learning how insignificant human life is in context with the universe or the geological timetable is very humbling to Tennyson and easily led to depression and doubts. If there is a God, Tennyson wonders, how He can be intimately involved in the lives of billions of people that are microscopic dust mites at best within the vastness of space and His creation.

Tennyson’s intense sorrow over the loss of his friend and his struggle with scientific theories and principles being meshed with Christian teachings leads to a deep faith based on a quest for the truth and a heartfelt desire to have a relationship with God and being reunited with Hallam again in the future. Tennyson did not throw in Christian allusions to impress his future wife or show how far he could “...go in the direction of Christianity” (Willey 104). Tennyson "by faith, and faith alone” (Prologue 3) looked to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as the answer to his emotional and spiritual pain. It is not un-Christian for Tennyson to struggle with doubt and question his beliefs. In fact, it is only through wrestling, fighting, and facing some of the tougher issues like death that Tennyson became mature, strong, and filled with true faith. As
perplexing as it seems, doubt is actually an important element for Tennyson to build true faith. Tennyson wrestled with thoughts and emotions that questioned and challenged his beliefs and, ultimately, doubtful imagery and illusions within the poem increase his faith and his hope in a God of love. The critic Gerald Bruns said *In Memoriam*’s “...expressions of doubt attend less to doubtful propositions of belief than to doubt’s travail, even as its expressions of belief are generated less by a coherent body of faith than by the dynamics of faithfulness” (Bruns 257). Faithfulness is a process developed and generated in Tennyson’s heart. Church teachings, dynamic sermons, and intensive Bible study were not the primary means Tennyson uses to develop faith—it came directly from God through Tennyson’s experiences and resides in his heart.

**Doubt—the Opposite of Faith?**

Doubt is a natural part of Tennyson’s Christian experience, especially during the difficult times he experiences throughout *In Memoriam*. And his doubts and misgivings are nothing unusual when looked at from a Biblical perspective. Comparing Tennyson’s “honest doubts” with some “spiritual giants” from the Bible reveals that it is not unusual for Christians to question their faith and the status of their relationship with God. King David, a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13: 22), doubted God often and felt hopeless and abandoned at times: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me?” (Ps. 22: 1). Although the psalm starts out in doubt and despair, David works through these feelings to express hope and joy in God’s promised deliverance in much the same way that Tennyson does in *In Memoriam*: “But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them...For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard”
Settle 33

(Ps. 22: 3-4, 24). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, who is considered to be one of the most faithful servants of God in the Bible, had his bouts with doubt and despair as well: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7: 24). Even Jesus shows his humanity in feeling forsaken by God in echoing David’s words above before he died on the cross (Matt. 27: 46). Before his trial, beating, and crucifixion, Jesus has his share of doubts and sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane and asks God to provide another route to salvation if possible (Matt. 26: 36-39). If his death was laid out ahead of time as the only way to save mankind from their sins, why would Jesus doubt and question God at all? Although Jesus was God in the flesh, his humanity experiences doubt similar to the doubt Tennyson expresses within *In Memoriam*.

Tennyson’s “honest doubts” lead to an awakening of a deeper and more personal Christian faith rather than yielding a universal faith that transcends Christianity and goes beyond a doctrinal, problem-solving, swallow the faith pill approach. Even the areas in the poem that express doubt have hints of hope and faith. In section fifty-four, Tennyson writes, “Oh yet we trust that somehow good / Will be the final goal of ill, / To pangs of nature, sins of will, / Defects of doubt, and taints of blood; / That nothing walks with aimless feet; / That not one life shall be destroyed, / Or cast as rubbish to the void, / When God hath made the pile complete” (LIV 1-8). Doubt is referred to as a defect, yet the final “goal” Tennyson clings to is the hope that all the evil and emptiness of this mortal existence will eventually be worked out by God for the good of humanity in the overall scheme of His plan. Tennyson’s words sound very similar to one of the greatest promises in the New Testament: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). No matter what happens to Tennyson during his short, physical existence, Tennyson trusts that
“...somehow good / Will be the final goal of ill” (LIV 1-2) and that God will make everything work out for the best ultimately. Later in the poem and later in the grieving process, Tennyson expresses a more mature understanding of doubt’s role in the process of building faith:

Perplex in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gather’d strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the specters of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone. (XCVI 9-20)

Faith is a perplexing topic, especially when “honest doubt” is an important element for internalizing faith within Tennyson’s heart and soul. Yet Tennyson discovers faith through “honest doubt” because he faces his doubts head on. He does not try to run away or bury his head in the sand, hoping the storm will pass. No, Tennyson “fought his doubts,” struggles, and perseveres to gather strength and “To find a stronger faith his own.” Tennyson discovers meaning and purpose in the darkness, and he discovers that power and light are present when circumstances seem dark and bleak.

Confounding human reason and intellect, experiencing the darkness of doubt causes Tennyson to gravitate towards the glimmers of hope and faith he saw in Christianity. According to Eugene August, “Tennyson intended the poem to portray a convincing resolution of doubt by faith” (August 217). As Tennyson expresses in the stanzas above, “honest doubt” leads to “a stronger faith.” A “resolution of doubt by faith” as described by August does not fully tie in with Tennyson’s idea that faith resides in “honest doubt.” So, it is not like faith overcomes doubt to Tennyson—the two seem to coexist in a complementary relationship. Despair over the loss of his
dear friend naturally led Tennyson to question the purpose of life and wonder if there is more to his frail mortality than the day-to-day struggle for survival. In his book *Writers and Their Background*, John Jump says Tennyson’s “...experiences naturally lead him to questions about death and survival after death and the existence of a loving God” (Jump 99). Why would a just and compassionate Creator allow Hallam to die in his youth when his talents and abilities were just beginning to bloom? If this life is all Tennyson had hope for, then Hallam’s death truly does not make sense, and human life is ultimately futile. Jump continues, “But *In Memoriam*, in its hope and its despondency, its doubt and its faith, possesses an inwardness and a desperate sincerity, recorded with the most delicate artistry, that make it unquestionable its author’s major achievement as a religious poet” (Jump 114). Yes, the struggle with doubt and despondency are apparent throughout the poem, but faith and hope triumph in the end. Tennyson was not a hypocrite. He looked at all the evidence and sincerely expressed the conflicting emotions and spiritual battles he was fighting.

**Faith and Hope—an Intuitive Process**

Tennyson expresses an ever-increasing measure of hope throughout *In Memoriam* in a life after death and that mankind will continue to evolve into a higher species as time progresses. Writing about Tennyson’s struggle with doubt, faith, and hope, John Jump says, “…the hope of the immortality of the soul was to remain a lifelong preoccupation with Tennyson” (Jump 90). Tennyson believed there was more to life than being born, living a vapor of an existence, and then dying and being blotted out for all eternity. Tennyson comments, “I can hardly understand...how any great imaginative man, who has deeply lived, suffered, thought and wrought, can doubt of the soul’s continuous progress in the after-life” (A. Tennyson 321). If this life was all Tennyson had hope for, his life would have been miserable and filled with despair,
especially not being able to look forward to being reunited with his best friend and soul mate. In addition to looking ahead to a life after physical death, Tennyson also believed mankind’s knowledge and understanding of the universe and life in general would increase and become clearer with each succeeding generation: “...the further science progressed, the more the Unity of Nature, and the purpose hidden behind the cosmic process of matter in motion and changing forms of life, would be apparent” (A. Tennyson 325). In contrast to being a poet plagued by doubt and despondency, Tennyson developed great optimism in the future of the physical creation and hope in life continuing beyond the short allotment of time mortals have on this earth.

Tennyson’s faith and hope do not come through reason or following a religious formula from the Church. Instead, intuition is the medium through which Tennyson senses the presence of God. David Shaw says, “Far from being an object he can clutch in his hands, faith is self-produced. It is what Kant would call a postulate of the Practical Reason, a regulative truth that makes life intelligible, but not a concept that the understanding can directly apprehend” (Shaw 159). Tennyson’s faith comes from within. He does not obtain it through study and good deeds, and it is not an object that Tennyson can see and touch. Life only makes sense to Tennyson through the lens of faith, yet his reason cannot explain why this is true. Basil Willey believes “...Tennyson fell back on the inward evidence, the reasons of the heart....” (Willey 100). A rational approach to matters of faith only led Tennyson to doubt and despair because reason is always looking for proof to support a feeling or belief. Faith is in Tennyson’s heart—it is associated with irrational elements such as feelings, emotions, and spiritual characteristics. In The Growth of the Poet, Jerome Buckley observes, “By intuition alone, the cry of his believing heart, can he answer the negations of an apparently ‘Godless’ nature. His faith, which thus rests
on the premise of feeling, resembles that of Pascal, who likewise trusted the reasons of the heart which reason could not know” (Buckley 125). Tennyson did not discover God in the natural world, nor did he discover Him through intellectual endeavors. His intuition and heart gave him the comfort and faith he needed to keep his rational questionings and doubts in check to create balance in his spiritual life:

That which we dare invoke to bless;
   Our dearest faith; our ghastliest doubt;
   He, They, One, All; within, without;
The power in darkness whom we guess;

I found Him not in world or sun,
   Or eagle’s wing, or insect’s eye;
   Nor thro’ the questions men may try.
The petty cobwebs we have spun:

If e’er when faith had fall’n asleep,
   I heard a voice ‘believe no more’
   And heard an ever-breaking shore
   That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt
   The freezing reason’s colder part,
   And like a man in wrath the heart
   Stood up and answer’d ‘I have felt. (CXXIV 1-16)

Faith and doubt dwell together in Tennyson’s heart. God’s nature of being personal on the one hand and all inclusive on the other are both true to Tennyson. Tennyson cannot see God because He has not been fully revealed. He is the “power in darkness” that is both real yet abstract as well. Tennyson cannot see God, yet he knows He is there. Tennyson does not discover God through looking at the vastness of the creation or the minutest details that the microscope reveals. Logic and reason are also insufficient mediums for connecting with his Creator. And, just when all hope seems to be lost and despair begins setting in because the physical evidence does not exist, Tennyson becomes aware of His Lord dwelling within his heart. The polar ice caps of reason on top are melted into a tropical paradise at the equator of Tennyson’s heart. He feels God’s presence, and although he cannot express it in scientific language, Tennyson uses the
most effective medium he has at his disposal. Poetry is the best expression of the truth within his heart. Intuition and spirituality cannot come through adequately by discursive and rational methods alone. But, poetry can tap into the heart and express the inexpressible in images and feelings.

In a world filled with violence, pestilence, and death, Tennyson’s heart tells him there is more to reality than what the five senses reveal. The “warmth within the breast” gives assurance to Tennyson that all is well even though perception and reason argue to the contrary. In his text *Writers and Their Background*, John Jump says, “Tennyson, however, was something of a Coleridgian and a good deal of a modern in that he based his belief in God not upon external evidences but upon inner experience” (Jump 106). As much as Tennyson desires physical proof and evidence (“eagle’s wing, or insect’s eye”) to support his religious beliefs, ultimately genuine faith that carries him through the valley of doubts, despair, and death must come from within the heart. Knowledge, education, and the intellect easily cloud the vision of Tennyson’s heart. His mind, heart, and spirit need to work in harmony and be in balance to provide a faith-focused perspective of life.

As a poet, Tennyson realizes the limitations of reason. The scientific method, rationalism, and logic are insufficient on their own for explaining the human condition. Reason must work together with the heart. E.D.H. Johnson expresses it this way: “In the end, then, Tennyson turns back to the life of the imagination, rediscovering in its resources confirmation of the intuitions which formed the basis of his religious faith: ‘But in my spirit will I dwell, / And dream my dream, and hold it true’ (123)” (Johnson 146). Tennyson finds no comfort dwelling in his mind through looking at life from strictly a rational and scientific point of view—the “freezing reason’s colder part.” Life is cold, meaningless, and depressing when reason rules. Tennyson,
instead, finds warmth and consolation in his heart and imagination—the “warmth within the breast.” Even though his feelings and beliefs may not have been in alignment with some traditional Christian teachings, Tennyson discovers joy and peace within his imagination. Michael Tomko says, “...a spiritualized inner life founded on the impassable barrier of soul and body, pearl and shell, has replaced any external basis of religion” (Tomko 127). Tennyson sees the limits and futility of human mortality, and he desires to tap into the eternal element of humanity, which he discovers within the heart.

The human body and mind dwindle and perish in a short timeframe. The inner workings of the spirit and heart are the key to immortality from Tennyson’s perspective. The confines of the human body and psyche are only a temporary shell within which dwells that which is eternal and unchanging. In *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture*, Jerome Buckley states that “Deep within him Tennyson cherished an honest will to believe, the intimation of immortality, stronger and more persistent than any passing wish to rationalize his doubt. By faith alone, ‘believing where we cannot prove,’ could he discover purpose in the brute fact of existence” (Buckley 85). Buckley hits on a key element of Tennyson’s Christian faith—the desire to believe. Amidst all the turmoil he experiences, Tennyson reaches the pinnacle of faith when he states “I have felt.” Tennyson could have rationalized away and justified his actions to clear his conscience. However, he achieves true faith and a relationship with God through a sincere desire to believe in that which he could not physically sense nor grasp.

Although certain areas of the physical world represent the grandeur and nature of its creator such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests, other areas of the world are filled with emptiness, poverty, disease, and suffering. How did Tennyson reconcile these inconsistencies? If nature is supposed to represent God, how can He be beautiful on the one hand and violent and
uncaring on the other? Critic Elisabeth Jay makes the following observation: “...Tennyson’s reading of Lyell...seemed to make it certain that man could no longer see nature as the revelation of God’s handiwork. Faith and hope...must then be redefined as a matter of inner conviction and the will to believe” (Jay 72). Lyell’s work showed that if man was subject to the same forces of nature that past species like the dinosaurs were, then he could one day end up being extinct and fossilized beneath layers of dirt, rock, and lava. Seeking to find God within the realm of the scientific world was not possible for Tennyson. The complexities of the universe and the sheer vastness of space suggest an intelligent design was implemented by an awesome Creator, yet how intimately involved is this Creator with a portion of His creation that is insignificant within the whole of the cosmos?

The physical realm and scientific methodology left Tennyson with a sense of hopelessness that he would not be reunited with Hallam. The physical realm is perceived by the five natural senses and is measurable and quantifiable using scientific methodologies. Heaven, on the other hand, is spiritual in nature, like God and the angels. It is invisible to the physical senses, and science cannot measure or quantify it. Tennyson develops the understanding that science is relevant on matters pertaining to the physical realm, but science is incapable of acknowledging or addressing the spiritual realm because it is not subject to sound scientific principles. In her book *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetic of Particularity in Victorian Poetry*, Carol Christ comments that “Tennyson’s shrewd doubt suggests not only a belief that the reality of the spiritual is greater than that of the material but a psychological insight into the nature of perception” (Christ 25). Tennyson perceives God’s existence and the hope of immortality through an intuitive process. He feels these things to be true: “To feel once more, in placid awe / The strong imagination roll / A sphere of stars about my soul, / In all her motion one with law”
The spiritual, eternal nature of life is more real to Tennyson than that which he perceives through his natural, physical senses.

Perception goes far beyond what he can see with his eyes; Tennyson can perceive with his intuition and heart as well, and the vision and reality can be stronger and more reliable than the sense of sight, which is limited, fading, and unreliable in many instances. K.W. Gransden says, "Tennyson further stresses that beneath all our intellectual show we are essentially inarticulate, unable to find words (other than formulas of doubtful value) to express our deepest feelings. And when he speaks in the first part of the poem of trusting 'what I feel is Lord of all' it is the word 'feel' which asks to be stressed" (Gransden 48). Tennyson recognizes the limits of human intelligence. It is through feeling that he has a connection with the eternal. Intuition proves to be a higher form of intelligence for Tennyson, and it helps him to overcome his doubts and live with confidence that his life is significant, and he will be unified with his friend in the future. Just as his eyes are unreliable, Tennyson also realizes how limited discursive activities are on the whole. Expressing the ethereal through corporeal means is not fully possible, and Tennyson recognizes the limitations people face when seeking to express and reveal their feelings and emotions. Robert Hass believes Tennyson resolves his doubt and despair through his imagination:

Moving beyond his personal struggle with the destructive forces of nature, Tennyson ultimately believes that poetry is a useful medium that can show people how to cope with a world whose religious certainties have been shattered by nineteenth-century materialism. For Tennyson, the discovery that imaginative activity is a saving medium that can be shared by others is finally the best and most acceptable resolution to In Memoriam. (Hass 686)

Composing In Memoriam was a healing process for Tennyson, and it allowed him to put everything into proper perspective. Yes, science was making some startling revelations about the nature of man and the environment he functions within. But, that does not change the intuitive
and spiritual aspects of life where the imagination, emotions, and feelings are an important aspect of humanity as well.

There are multiple passages within the poem showing the strong sense of hope Tennyson had in life. Looking at his frail mortality, Tennyson writes, "My own dim life should teach me this, / That life shall live for evermore, / Else earth is darkness at the core, / And dust and ashes all that is" (XXXIV 1-4). As the Apostle Paul exclaims, "If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’" (I Cor. 15: 32). Without hope in life "for evermore" or a purpose and usefulness to this fleeting existence, the future is bleak and human life is pointless and meaningless. People might as well live it up and “party hearty” if all they have to look forward to is death and nothingness for the rest of eternity. Victorian humanists would argue, on the other hand, that the absence of God and an after-life should prompt people to take full advantage of the short and precious life they have to live life to the fullest and make their lives beneficial to others. This agnostic approach, while honest and sincere, does not bring much hope from Tennyson’s perspective because human life is so short and insignificant when looked at from a strictly scientific and physical perspective.

Without the reality of life after death, the sorrow and suffering of humanity do not make sense, and people are left in despair as they realize how inconsequential their lives are and how “futile and frail” human life is within the scope of history and the universe. While Tennyson’s intellect was pushing him in the direction of this agnostic view of life, his heart could not accept this concept. He needed God and the hope the Christian faith offers in eternal life beyond death and the grave. “Dust and ashes” are a reference to Ash Wednesday, the beginning of lent, which reminds people that life is temporary and mortal. Without the hope of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, death and darkness are what Tennyson has to look forward to at the end of the road.
However, the road of life will not end for Tennyson when he dies. As Tennyson progresses through the healing process of losing his best friend, he becomes more and more hopeful that he will see Hallam again:

Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside;
And I shall know him when we meet:

And we shall sit at endless feast,
Enjoying each the other's good:
What vaster dream can hit the mood
Of Love on earth? He seeks at least

Upon the last and sharpest height,
Before the spirits fade away,
Some landing-place, to clasp and say,
"Farewell! We lose ourselves in light." (XLVII 5-16)

Tennyson laments the separation he has from Hallam, yet Tennyson looks ahead to a reunion where they will recognize each other and enjoy one another's company again. There will not be worry over being separated again by death or other enemies that haunt mortals continually. Tennyson looks ahead to an eternal existence with Hallam where they will feast, be joyful, and experience a "Love" deeper and richer than the love they had together in the flesh. The symbolism of clasping hands together signifies a unity of souls that say "Farewell! We lose ourselves in light," which, although Tennyson and Hallam are distinguished in the afterlife, they will also be absorbed in the "light" and "love" of Christ (John 1: 9-11). The "endless feast" Tennyson refers to is likely a reference to the marriage supper of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and His bride, the Church (Rev. 19: 7-9). In fact, Tennyson seems to draw upon the imagery provided in the last chapters of the Book of Revelation to support his Christian perspective of heaven. In the end, God promises to remove all evil from the world and create a new heaven and a new earth. The "New Jerusalem" will come to earth and full redemption will be achieved. Although there is unity, joy, and peace in God's kingdom, people (souls) seem to be distinguished and enjoy a
measure of identity and independence. When Tennyson says that we will “lose ourselves in light,” it is likely he had Jesus and the New Jerusalem in mind. Referring to the New Jerusalem, the author of Revelation writes, “And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb (Jesus—the “Lamb” of God) is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it” (Rev. 21: 23-24). Jesus will be the illumination within God’s kingdom, and he is probably the “light” Tennyson sees in his future reunion with Hallam in heaven.

Tennyson clearly understands and has hope that his mortal existence is a very small part of a grander plan: “Eternal process moving on, / From state to state the spirit walks; / And these are but the shatter’d stalks, / Or ruin’d chrysalis of one” (LXXXII 5-8). Tennyson believes he has an immortal soul dwelling within a mortal and temporary shell and, at death, the soul will be released from the body like a butterfly bursting through the restrictive encasing of a caterpillar. “Nor blame I Death, because he bare, / The use of virtue out of earth: / I know transplanted human worth / Will bloom to profit, otherwhere” (LXXXII 9-12). Death is humanity’s enemy, yet Tennyson believes death will be swallowed up in victory in an eternal life beyond the “shatter’d stalks” where death will be irrelevant and will lose its sting forever. Hallam died, but the “eternal process” moves on. Death is not the end—it is one more milestone in God’s eternal plan for mankind. “For this alone on Death I wreak / The wrath that garners in my heart; / He put our lives so far apart / We cannot hear each other speak” (LXXXII 13-16). Although Tennyson has hope and faith that Death will not have the last word, he laments about the gulf between himself and Hallam. Tennyson is angry at the separation he has with his beloved friend. The unity they experienced as young scholars was temporarily severed at Hallam’s death, and
Tennyson longs to reunite with his spiritual soul-mate. In an attempt to connect with his lost friend, Tennyson writes,

The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
On doubts that drive the coward back,
And keen thro' wordy snares to track
Suggestion to her inmost cell.

So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touch'd me from the past,
And all at once it seem'd at last
The living soul was flash'd on mine,

And mine in this was wound, and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Aeonian music measuring out
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
The blows of Death. At length my trance
Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt. (XCV 29-44)

In his vacillation between faith and doubt, Tennyson longs to be with Hallam. He appears to have achieved a trance-like, existential experience where Hallam is alive and well and present with Tennyson. As Tennyson reads Hallam’s words from the past, Hallam becomes a part of him. Commenting on this experience, Donald Hair says “He uses ‘living soul,’ I think, to indicate not just a repetition of creation, but a recreation or rebirth, both like and unlike the first. It is like the first because Tennyson wants to affirm Hallam’s continuing life, the unbroken connection of the ‘living soul’ with the Hallam Tennyson knew…” (Hair 181). Tennyson needs the assurance that Hallam is still alive and his life has not been snuffed out forever. As Tennyson reaches the climax of this experience and enjoys a few moments with Hallam’s “living soul,” he is brought back down to earth by “the steps of time—the shocks of chance—the blows of death.” The constraints of human mortality prevent Tennyson from bridging the gap between heaven and earth to enjoy a lasting experience and relationship with Hallam.
Even with the strongest of faith, Tennyson still mourns the loss of his loved one. Bitterness and anguish certainly fill Tennyson’s heart as he struggles with Death and the sorrow inflicted to his spirit. Even though time had healed his wounds, the scars remain. Like husband and wives who have been separated by death and long to join one another again in heaven, Tennyson longs to shed the shell of his mortality, and meet his friend again in God’s kingdom. “What time mine own might also flee, / As link’d with thine in love and fate, / And, hovering o’er the dolorous strait / To the other shore, involved in thee” (LXXXIV 37-40). Tennyson would not be disappointed if death would take him as well instead of leaving him behind to suffer the almost unbearable pain of mourning and grief.

**Love—the Goal of the Christian Faith, not a Homosexual Expression**

Tennyson and Hallam developed a bond of love with each other but not a homosexual love as some critics have erroneously theorized. *In Memoriam*, when looked at on the whole, expresses love based on Christian principles. Did Tennyson doubt his own sexuality and feelings towards Hallam? Possibly, but the erotic imagery he uses likely best represents the depth of outgoing concern he has for his lost friend. Christopher Ricks exclaims, “The vehemence of Tennyson’s love for Hallam is certainly remarkable, but then a powerful and original poem is likely to be remarkable” (Ricks 216). Tennyson uses the most powerful language and imagery possible to express his love for Hallam. Even though he refers to him as a “mate,” he uses that term to show how deeply connected they are on a spiritual plane and not a physical one. Tennyson laments, “My Arthur, whom I shall not see / Till all my widow’d race be run; / Dear as the mother to the son, / More than my brothers are to me” (IX 17-20). Line 18 is repeated in section XVII 20 as well. Tennyson uses the imagery associated with a widow and the love between a mother and child to illustrate how deep his feelings are for his beloved friend. John D.
Rosenberg says, “The emotion Tennyson communicates in his greatest poetry is deeply sexual but not erotic, a distinction perhaps harder for men to grasp than for women but, perhaps, not unknown to the mother with an infant at her breast” (Rosenberg 303). The image of a nursing child is a great analogy of the bond of love Tennyson has with Hallam. In contrast to Rosenberg’s observation that Tennyson’s “greatest poetry is deeply sexual,” however, it is unlikely that Tennyson had any sexual motivations or inclinations at all towards Hallam based on the evidence within the poem. Tennyson loves Hallam more than his own brothers—they have a friendship and bond that transcends genetics:

Thy blood, my friend, and partly mine;  
For now the day was drawning on,  
When thou should’st link thy life with one  
Of mine own house, and boys of thine

Had babbled “Uncle” on my knee;  
But that remorseless iron hour  
Made cypress of her orange flower,  
Despair of Hope, and earth of thee. (LXXXIV 9-16)

Tennyson is disappointed that Hallam never had the opportunity to marry his sister, Emily. Although they were engaged, Arthur died before the wedding could take place. Tennyson would have been filled with joy to have his best friend as a brother-in-law as well. To think that Tennyson had sexual feelings towards Hallam, who was engaged to his sister, is unlikely. Jack Kolb comments, “For much of the Victorian age, In Memoriam served as a poetic alternative to the Bible, for both believers and honest doubters, many of whom would have strong objections to insinuations of homosexuality” (Kolb 369). Looking at In Memoriam and Tennyson’s motivations and feelings towards Hallam through a homosexual lens is a relatively recent phenomenon. It would have been strange and unacceptable to suggest to a Victorian audience that Tennyson had sexual feelings for Hallam. Yes, Tennyson loves Hallam but with a love that far transcends the physical. Hallam was not only a dear friend. He was also a spiritual brother
who was destined to become a member of Tennyson’s family through his marriage to Emily Tennyson.

Tennyson also uses the love Shakespeare had for the young man in his *Sonnets* to express how much he loved Hallam. Tennyson proclaims, “I loved thee, Spirit, and love, nor can / The soul of Shakespeare love thee more” (LXI 11-12). Tennyson’s love transcends Shakespeare’s love as expressed in the *Sonnets*. Christopher Ricks says, “Some Victorians, who found Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* troubling, found *In Memoriam* troubling” (Ricks 219). Men can have a deeply intimate and loving relationship without it being homosexual. Love is a force that bonds individuals together more on a spiritual level than a physical one. Ricks goes on to compare Tennyson’s love for Hallam to Shakespeare’s love for the man in his *Sonnets*: “When he praised Hallam for ‘manhood fused with female grace,’ he was willing to make unembarrassedly explicit the likeness to Christ, ‘that union of man and woman.’ He saw such a union as morally and religiously desirable, not sexually so” (Ricks 218). The love Tennyson expresses for Hallam is a Christian love that is based on having a unified and meaningful relationship. Men often have trouble tapping into their emotions and expressing their love and affection for one another. There is nothing “gay” about this from Tennyson’s point of view—it is actually a measure of maturity when a man is able to express love and concern towards other males although it may not be the “macho” thing to do. Both Christ and Hallam represent the ideal man to Tennyson. Both were strong and masculine, yet they were caring and compassionate as well. Tennyson had a loving relationship with both, and he was not afraid to express his feelings towards Christ and Hallam. Tennyson’s love for Hallam represented a Christian ideal for relationships between men, and there was nothing unusual about the depth of love and affection Tennyson expresses towards Hallam.
While there may be doubts in the critical world about the nature of Tennyson's and Hallam's relationship, the evidence within the poem indicates their love was based more on Christian principles versus homosexual ones. Looking at the verses, “Descend, and touch, and enter; hear / The wish too strong for words to name; / That in this blindness of the frame / My Ghost may feel that thine is near” (XCIII 13-16), some critics look at this from a sexual perspective. But, Tennyson is looking for his spirit to connect with the spirit or ghost of Hallam. He does not desire a sexual encounter; instead, he is looking for a spiritual connection. Michael Wheeler comments, “Thus the lines that most excite those who read In Memoriam as a poem of homosexual love – ‘Descend, and touch, and enter; hear / The wish too strong for words to name’ – can be located in a tradition of inspirational language associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit…” (Wheeler 250). The Holy Spirit descends from God and touches people’s hearts. The Holy Spirit’s function is to “descend, and touch, and enter” a person’s inner most being to begin manifesting the character of Christ. Tennyson was looking for a spiritual union and experience and not a physical one.

The love between Hallam and Tennyson is a Christian love based on doing what is best and fulfilling the needs of one another on an intellectual, emotional, and a spiritual level. “Arrive at last the blessed goal, / And He that died in Holy Land / Would reach us out the shining hand, / And take us as a single soul” (LXXXIV 41-44). This is a reference to Christ, who died in the Holy Land, Palestine, yet rose from the dead, is alive now, and promised that “He” would return again to unite with His disciples and bring them into oneness with God and His family for all eternity. The “blessed goal” Tennyson looks forward to is eternal life in God’s kingdom with his dear friend Arthur Hallam. And as indicated in these lines, it is Christ who will make this possible—not some generalized faith in God and an after-life that many world religions also
proclaim. Jack Kolb concludes his observations on the potential for a homosexual motivation within *In Memoriam* by stating, “As the body of this article has sought to demonstrate, no critic cited—Sinfield, Nunokawa, Craft, nor Dellamora—has offered persuasive evidence that Tennyson and Hallam were homosexual lovers, or even thought of a homosexual relationship” (Kolb 388). The critics are unable to offer persuasive evidence because the probability of such a relationship is unlikely considering Tennyson’s Christian focus and love expressed throughout the poem.

Tennyson’s motivation for *In Memoriam* was to express his love for Hallam. Although he used provocative language to do this, the speculation surrounding homosexual intentions or suppressed sexuality towards Hallam lacks specific facts and evidence. In a recent article addressing feminine imagery within Tennyson’s poetry, John Hughes writes:

> In terms of the convergences of different lines of argument that I am suggesting, Tennyson indeed was not a homosexual male, nor was he “androgyinous,” nor was he drawn to a “blurring” or “inversion” or “transgression” of gender differences…. Rather, his imagination was essentially animated by an intrapsychic drama of identification, a rapt or fearful fascination with female figures that was itself predicated on the surest sense of sexual difference…but that aspired, in its most extreme form, to an imagined change of gender. (Hughes 106)

Considering Tennyson’s Christian focus on this issue, Hughes’ observation makes sense. With Christ and Hallam as types of a higher human existence, Tennyson envisions men incorporating feminine characteristics to become more complete and balanced in their lives. Just as husband and wives compliment and strengthen one another in a unified relationship, the ideal human being is able to take on both masculine and feminine characteristics to be strong and rational while being compassionate and caring at the same time. Stating that Tennyson imagined a “change of gender” is probably taking this concept too far, though. Rather, *In Memoriam* suggests that the ideal evolutionary progress of humanity fuses male and female together into
one complete individual who is able to draw upon the strengths of both sexes versus seeking to become the opposite sex.

**Reconciliation—a State of Peace, Understanding, and Wholeness**

Tennyson not only had hope in life after death, he also had the hope that mankind would continue to reach higher planes of existence—each succeeding generation becoming more advanced than the previous one. “As one would sing the death of war, / And one would chant the history / Of that great race, which is to be, / And one the shaping of a star” (CIII 33-36). Tennyson looks ahead in hopefulness to a better standard of life for people. Evolution does not conflict with the plan and purpose of God in Tennyson’s mind—it is at work in both the physical and spiritual realms. Peter Poland comments on this concept: “And this ‘great race’ represents the culmination of the evolutionary process. It embraces the best of both possible worlds: ‘the great progress of the age as well as the opening of another [and more spiritual] world,’ ‘the great hopes of humanity and science’” (Poland 86). Tennyson is optimistic and hopeful that mankind will move forward and progress in all areas of their society—social, spiritual, economic, and technology. Just as species evolve and improve with time, man has and will continue to evolve and reach higher planes of existence. “Contemplate all this work of Time, / The giant labouring in his youth; / Nor dream of human love and truth, / As dying Nature’s earth and lime” (CXVIII 1-4). Mankind has been through some tough times in history, and the earth is in a continual state of decay and renewal. Tennyson’s hope was the “work of Time” would shape humanity in “love and truth” for a better and more optimistic era on the earth. “But trust that those we call the dead / Are breathers of an ampler day / For ever nobler ends” (CXVIII 5-7). In section CXVIII, Tennyson looks ahead to a better future for mankind both in the physical sense through evolution and the spiritual sense in the immortality of the soul.
As Tennyson worked through the grieving process and healing began to take place, there was not a conflict in his mind between evolution and Christianity. Both played an important role for mankind: one for physical life and the other for spiritual life. "Not only cunning casts in clay: / Let Science prove we are, and then / What matters Science unto men, / At least to me? I would not stay" (CXX 5-8). Science has its place, but it does not explain the purpose of life for Tennyson. Science deals with measurable phenomena and addresses questions dealing with the physical realm. It does not answer spiritual questions such as why people are born, why they die, and is there a life after death? Tennyson understands the limitations of science and looks to his Christian faith in saying "I would not stay" here and be buried and fossilized. "Let him, the wiser man who springs / Hereafter, up from childhood shape / His action like the greater ape, / But I was born to other things" (CXX 9-12). Tennyson accepts scientific revelations showing the earth is much older than theologians thought as they looked at a literal interpretation of Genesis—"Prehistoric man" seems to conflict with God creating Adam as the first human. But, to Tennyson, the "greater ape" is not on the same plane as Adam. Unlike the ape, Tennyson has "other things" to look forward to beyond the limited physical existence that constrains him as a man. Tennyson writes, "To shape and use. Arise and fly / The reeling Faun, the sensual feast; / Move upward, working out the beast, / And let the ape and tiger die" (CXVIII 25-28). Tennyson looks at evolution as a process where the brute forces of nature and the bestial drives within people will gradually but steadily be replaced by a higher level of existence where love, peace, and the higher senses will dominate people's thoughts, emotions, and actions. Tennyson believes humans are much more than beasts. They have an awareness of their existence, free will, and are sentient beings capable of making moral decisions and tapping into their eternal potential.
Tennyson and Hallam must have had long theological discussions on the relationship between evolution and faith. Tennyson hints at the type of meaningful dialog he enjoyed with Hallam when he was alive. “Of letters, genial table-talk, / Or deep dispute, and graceful jest” (LXXXIV 23-24). Tennyson and Hallam enjoyed the full range of human interaction and interpersonal communication. Referring to their academic days when they were both members of the scholarly, intellectual organization called the “Apostles,” Tennyson writes, “Where once we held debate, a band / Of youthful friends, on mind and art, / And labour, and the changing mart, / And all the framework of the land” (LXXXVII 21-24). Tennyson and Hallam talked about everything, and their conversations traveled into the deeper and more controversial issues of life. Rather than being swayed into polarities like many scientists and theologians were, however, Tennyson and Hallam looked for ways to reconcile new scientific discoveries of the 19th Century with a better understanding of and hope in the Christian faith. According to the critic John Jump, in his book *Writers and Their Background*, Tennyson believed “…that the evolutionary process will give rise to a ‘higher race’ (CXVIII); that Hallam in his own being anticipated this development; and that the emergence of ‘that great race, which is to be’ (CIII), will bring nearer to fulfillment the providential plan of the loving God in whom Hallam now dwells” (Jump 104). Tennyson and Hallam both believed that God’s plan for mankind included circumstances continuing to improve for people with each new generation (human “evolution” as defined by Tennyson) and a life after death for all eternity in God’s kingdom (“faith” in God’s promises and the immortality of the soul). While this belief does not tie in directly with traditional Christian theology, it does allow Tennyson to reconcile new scientific discoveries with his Christian beliefs and faith. Gerald Bruns says, “*In Memoriam* begins in chaos and ends with the evocation of a new cosmos, a newly felt order of creation predicated upon the active unity of God and
Tennyson discovers that faith in God and evolution do not have to be looked at as incompatible opposites. Actually, both enhance a deeper understanding of God's work within the physical and spiritual realms of creation. Bruns goes on to speak of a "...higher faith, God's presence in the world—his presence, less as a personal incarnation within human time than as an immanent and creative power that drives history forward toward a point of coherence and repose" (Bruns 249). For Tennyson, God is working behind the scenes in the big picture to ensure everything works out for the best within His creation.

Doubt, faith, and hope brought Tennyson to the love of God as the source of peace and healing he needed to accept the loss of Hallam. Sorrow would remain throughout the remainder of his life, but Tennyson was given strength through his Christian faith, hope, and love. According to John Jump, the poem expresses an "...intuitive and confessedly unverifiable sense of the divine love.... The sorrow that inspires him seeks merely to subordinate each 'slender shade of doubt to love'" (Jump 91, 96). Tennyson struggles with sorrow, doubt, and even a sense of abandonment, but his Christian faith becomes stronger as a result because the "negative" and difficult experiences Tennyson has build faith, trust, and love. Jump continues: "In Memoriam, then, is in the first instance a personal poem; it expresses the desolation of a man whose friend has died with his great promise unfulfilled, and it evokes for us the love which bound, and binds, the two of them" (Jump 99). Emptiness and grief through death could not change the love between Tennyson and Hallam. It actually strengthened the bond between them and the hope Tennyson had for a reunion in the future. According to Jump, "For Tennyson, belief in a loving God necessarily entailed belief in eternal life" (Jump 107). The two go hand-in-hand: faith in a God of love yields hope and confidence in life after death for Tennyson. "Convinced of the reality of the spirit, [Tennyson] could have faith in a loving God and in human survival. Men
needed this faith. If it were to be destroyed in them, nothing could prevent them from lapsing into bestiality and chaos" (Jump 113). Yes, Tennyson, like most educated and intellectual people of his day, struggled with new revelations from scientific discoveries that questioned and challenged the Christian faith. However, he reconciled the advances in science with a more mature understanding of Christianity and a return to its basic tenets and foundation.

**Circle Imagery and the Cyclical Nature of Life**

Tennyson also uses circle imagery throughout *In Memoriam* to show the cyclical nature of life and how opposites actually coexist within the same realms. His Christian outlook seems to reflect a more medieval perspective towards life, the creation, and God in general. Medieval Christians looked at God's creation as seven perfect spheres with Earth at the center and God as the "unmoved mover," who moves everything by desire and love. As one moves further out into the universe and the creation, one moves to higher planes of existence and becomes closer to God. While Tennyson likely rejected the medieval creation model from a physical perspective based on scientific discoveries, he seems to accept the model from a spiritual perspective. God is love, and all that He has made was created from love—a desire to give and share His power and wealth. There are several passages within *In Memoriam* that have circular, cyclical imagery within them. Tennyson falls back on a simpler, purer medieval-type-perspective of God and His creation:

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The great Intelligences fair
    That range above our mortal state,
    In circle round the blessed gate,
Received and gave him welcome there;

And led him thro' the blissful climes,
    And show'd him in the fountain fresh
    All knowledge that the sons of flesh
Shall gather in cycled times. (LXXXV 21-28)
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Spiritually, Tennyson is looking upward at the higher existence above the frail and temporary human condition. There is a circle around heaven's gate that has welcomed Hallam to eternal life in bliss and joy. All the questions and knowledge people have sought throughout history on the purpose of life are answered in heaven based on Tennyson’s vision. At best, humans only gain bits and pieces on the ultimate plan God has for their lives. Tennyson writes, “And seem to lift the form, and glow / In azure orbits heavenly-wise; / And over those ethereal eyes / The bar of Michael Angelo” (LXXXVII 37-40). “Ethereal eyes” is a definite medieval perspective of heaven, and Tennyson likely visualized Michael Angelo’s “Creation of Adam” atop the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as God reaches out to touch his beloved creation in Tennyson’s reference to the great artist.

Opposites are all a part of the holistic human experience to bring people closer to God. For Tennyson, doubt and faith coexist together. As the sun eventually rises to drive away the darkness, faith rises to remove the doubts in Tennyson’s life. In a life filled with ambiguity and opposition, nothing makes sense until Jesus Christ enters human history:

‘Rapt from the fickle and the frail
With gather’d power, yet the same,
Pierces the keen seraphic flame
From orb to orb, from veil to veil.

Rise, happy morn, rise, holy morn,
Draw forth the cheerful day from night:
O Father, touch the east, and light
The light that shone when Hope was born. (XXX 25-32)

Human life is fickle and frail, but it is only one small part of the life God offers to mankind. Tennyson has the opportunity for power and to travel beyond the confines of his mortal existence into the heavenly orbs. The “veil” that separated God from humanity was torn asunder through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Matt. 27: 51). Tennyson realizes Jesus’ death brings life to humanity. Darkness has its time, but the Son has also risen. “Hope” comes to Tennyson through
Jesus. Night and day oscillate within the same sphere, but when the light does come, darkness flees. Light consumes darkness just as faith consumes doubt.

Several critics have noticed the circular nature of *In Memoriam* as well. The structure of the poem is cyclical and vacillates back and forth between the conflicting forces of life. Christopher Ricks notes, “Indeed, the *In Memoriam* stanza (abba) is especially suited to turning round rather than going forward” (Ricks 222). A good example of this is found at the beginning of the poem: “The seasons bring the flower again, / And bring the firstling to the flock; / And in the dusk of thee, the clock / Beats out the little lives of men” (II 5-8). The seasonal, cyclical forces of nature are prevalent throughout the poem on both a micro and macro level. “The seasons bring the flower,” yet the “little lives of men” are beat out by these same forces at the end of this *abba* stanza. Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter come around on regular intervals, and the three Christmases are a cyclical reoccurrence within *In Memoriam* as well. During the initial stages of grief for Tennyson, what starts out as doubt leads into faith but, then, cycles back to prevailing doubt. As the seasons progress and Tennyson moves forward as well, faith is prevalent. Sure, the doubts resurface, but they are contained within the context of faith. Erik Gray writes, “The consistent use of a single stanza—what has been called the *In Memoriam* stanza—reinforces the sense that although the speaker may feel himself to be filled with conflicting, even contradictory feelings, nevertheless he retains some integrity, a hope of eventually resolving the disparate impulses he feels” (Gray xv). Tennyson’s emotional and spiritual doubts are not permanent. They pass with time, and Tennyson clings to the hope that his condition will improve, people will get better with each new generation, and he will see his friend once again. During the darkest point of night, as tough as it is, Tennyson believes the dawn of a new era will come. Although the *abba* stanza illustrates continual shifting and a broad
range of emotions and doubts, faith has its turn on the circle and causes doubt to flee from its presence. Sarah Gates observes, "...the peculiar appropriateness of Tennyson's *abba* stanza form as a vehicle for embodying and signifying his intellectual and spiritual conflicts...and his own journey through them..." (Gates 507-8). Tennyson comes to an understanding that opposites are all tied together in the overall scheme of life: "And East and West, without a breath, / Mixt their dim lights, like life and death, / To broaden into boundless day" (XCV 62-64). Opposites like "East and West" and "life and death" are all woven together to bring Tennyson's journey ultimately into "boundless day." Gates continues, "But this new faith is, of course, susceptible to new doubts—the spiral does not stop—as we find in studying, for example, section 122" (Gates 514). The *abba* stanza is a three dimensional object that is best represented by a funnel that progresses upward and outward. The funnel continues to become larger in circumference as Tennyson progresses into higher plains of existence. The spiral upwards starts with faith, encounters doubt, and then arrives at a new level of faith that is then challenged by new doubts. Faith and doubt coexist within the funnel. As one level of doubt is overcome, a higher level of doubt needs to be overcome at the next level. The cycle is never-ending as Tennyson's quest for faith always moves upward and outward like the shape of a funnel.

The intensely honest journey from doubt to faith that Tennyson undertakes throughout *In Memoriam* causes him to face the realities of life and his human nature to obtain joy and peace through darkness and difficulties. The loss of Hallam is a deeply painful blow for Tennyson to absorb. In her book *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetic of Particularity in Victorian Poetry*, Carol Christ observes, "...he emphasizes not the spiritual paradox of the one in the many but the perceptual paradox that an extreme emotion can create an extraordinary consciousness of particulars, whose individuality is intensified rather than extinguished by the emotion" (Christ
23). The “extreme emotion” in *In Memoriam* is grief. And, it is through that grief that Tennyson focuses on other particulars within his heart and mind such as doubt, faith, hope, and love. The grieving process forces Tennyson to confront what is really important in life—is there more to life than a brief existence on earth and is there a God who truly loves him and has a lasting plan for his life? Anna Henchman says, “The form of the elegy likewise works against a sense of coherent progression from grief to consolation. Instead, like the astronomical technique of parallax, its structure works on the principle that a single subject position can never produce a complete description of the object. Missing pieces lead one to draw distorted conclusions, and only a plenitude of positions begins to produce something like the truth” (Henchman 43).

Tennyson took a twenty-seven year journey while writing *In Memoriam* to discover the truth. Rather than taking a linear progression from grief to consolation, Tennyson travels upwards within the funnel and spirals his way to a fuller and more complete view of the Christian journey.

*In Memoriam* is an allegory that expresses how all the apparent contradictions in life are actually tied together within the same continuum. Life and death, doubt and faith, despair and hope, and hate and love are all part of the cycle of life, and they all serve their purpose of teaching Tennyson what is important and drawing him nearer to God (Ecc. 3: 1-8). It does not make sense to a rational thinker like Tennyson, but opposing forces in human endeavors are integrated together. Sarah Gates says, “The vacillation between opposite aspects of a theme or between opposing states of mind (such as hope and despair) that turn out not to oppose but to define each other is a crucial modus operandi in *In Memoriam*” (Gates 590). So, building on Gates’ observation, doubt actually defines faith. How can Tennyson truly have faith if he does not experience doubt or know what it entails? Gates also comments that “the vacillations between faith and doubt supply one of those ‘animating’ forces that run through the poem—one
that fails to settle even in the very frame that is supposed to resolve and close it” (Gates 513).
Until Tennyson dies, there will be no final resolution to doubt. No matter how much faith
Tennyson has, doubt will always be lingering in the shadows. Even with the hope that God and
Hallam are not far from him, Tennyson still feels doubt towards the end of his journey in the
poem: “No, like a child in doubt and fear: / But that blind clamour made me wise; / Then was I
as a child that cries, / But, crying, knows his father is near” (CXXIV 17-20). As an infant,
Tennyson knows his heavenly “father is near,” yet he still cannot see him in the night and has
those feelings of doubt and fear—what will happen to him if his cries go unanswered?

Some criticize Tennyson for not achieving final resolution in *In Memoriam*, but from
Tennyson’s point of view, total resolution will not be achieved during his mortal life. That will
not happen until he is given the gift of eternal life, and God establishes a new heaven and a new
earth where sorrow, doubt, and even death will be done away with completely (Rev. 21: 1-4).
Commenting on the faith Tennyson expresses within *In Memoriam*, Professor Sidgwick writes to
Hallam Tennyson about the impressions the poem had on men from Cambridge saying, “Faith
must give the last word: but the last word is not the whole utterance of the truth: the whole truth
is that assurance and doubt must alternate in the moral world in which we at present live,
somewhat as night and day alternate in the physical world” (A. Tennyson 304). Tennyson needed
to experience both the good and the bad, the day and the night, the warmth and the cold to fully
appreciate and choose to follow God and His principles by his own free will (Deut. 30: 15-16,
19-20). Unfortunately, it seems Tennyson needed to go into the valley of doubt before he could
begin traveling up the mountain of faith.

If there is any sense of resolution at all within *In Memoriam*, it is the hope and conviction
Tennyson has that everything has a purpose within the cycle of life. In his excellent article
entitled, “Circle Imagery in Tennyson’s In Memoriam,” James Taaffe comments, “The central accomplishment of In Memoriam is, of course, the poet’s final firm conviction that the ‘circle’ of Hallam in the world of the dead is actually part of a larger circle, or cycle, of all existence” (Taaffe 125). No, Tennyson could no longer enjoy friendship and fellowship with Hallam, but Tennyson did have hope that his death was not in vain. “Far off thou art, but ever nigh; / I have thee still, and I rejoice; / I prosper, circled with thy voice; / I shall not lose thee tho’ I die” (CXXX 13-16). Although there is separation and distance between Tennyson and Hallam through death, Hallam is still an integral part of Tennyson’s life. The circle imagery is present through having Hallam’s voice speaking to Tennyson beyond the boundary of the grave. Hallam is far away, but he is also close to Tennyson. And once Tennyson dies, he will enjoy life with Hallam forever. Death is as much a part of life as doubt is with faith. Taaffe believes that “eventually faith will conquer doubt, and the circle image functions to indicate a spiritual direction, thus contributing in its way to the spiritual cosmology of In Memoriam” (Taaffe 125).

The medieval description of the seven spheres of God’s creation is an apt metaphor for Tennyson’s progression from doubt to faith. Each new phase or sphere of Tennyson’s spiritual journey becomes larger in circumference and, of course, the broader Tennyson’s faith becomes, the more challenging each new level of doubt becomes. Referring to CXVIII, 25-28, Taaffe says, “The spiraling imagery of the poem skillfully suggests Tennyson’s hope that man himself will evolve spiritually, ‘working out the beast’ in his move toward immortality. Man’s duty was to evolve, and Tennyson expresses the way of this evolution in terms of circles and orbs” (Taaffe 128). Mankind must take the same journey Tennyson has taken as he builds a larger funnel towards the goal of Christ’s character.

In tracts of fluent heat began,  
And grew to seeming-random forms,  
The seeming prey of cyclic storms,
Till at the last arose the man;

Who throve and branch’d from clime to clime,
   The herald of a higher race,
   And of himself in higher place,
If so he type this work of time

Within himself, from more to more;
   Or, crown’d with attributes of woe
   Like glories, move his course, and show
That life is not as idle ore,

But iron dug from central gloom,
   And heated hot with burning fears,
   And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
   And batter’d with the shocks of doom

To shape and use. Arise and fly
   The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
   Move upward, working out the beast,
   And let the ape and tiger die. (CXVIII 9-28)

Tennyson accepts the discoveries of the physical sciences and sees the progression of evolution within both the earth’s geological record and humanity’s advances from lower forms of life. Just as iron ore is transformed into steel that gets processed into products that serve a higher purpose in people’s live, humanity is undergoing processing as well to progress from a beast driven by instinct and natural desires to become more like Hallam—a man who represents the ideal human being in Tennyson’s mind where the mind, heart, and soul are working together in perfect harmony. Human nature with all of its sin and selfishness must be replaced by God’s nature of love and selflessness. The aggressiveness associated with a market economy and the survival of the fittest must be transformed into a world where predators have become peaceful, and violence will be replaced by a community atmosphere of mutually beneficially coexistence (Isa. 11: 6-9).

K.W. Gransden sums up it all up very well: “Thus In Memoriam is a journey from doubt and despair to acceptance, a journey through time and experience in which past, present, and future co-exist, and in which different modes of experience (memory, speculation, vision) all find a place” (Gransden 51). Christ is described as the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end.
Time is relative from God’s point of view. Tennyson captures this vision in part through *In Memoriam*. Doubt is not separate from faith just as life and death are connected as well.

Everything has its place and purpose in life.

**Faith, Hope, and Love—All Things Work Together for the Good**

In the end, Tennyson comes to a fuller realization that love is the final goal everyone should strive for. Rather than adhering to specific creeds within the Anglican Church as a means to weather the storms of grief and doubt, Tennyson instead threw himself upon the grace and love of God. Where religion made things complicated for Tennyson, Christ invited him to put on the easy yoke and work with him to spread love and mercy to others. Tennyson’s faith was heavily influenced by F. D. Maurice, who was a member of the Cambridge Apostles and became a Chaplain of Lincoln’s Inn in 1846. Maurice did not associate himself with any of the divisions within the Anglican Church or other Christian sects. Instead, his Christian faith and teachings were grounded in the love of God (Mattes 90-98). It seems too simple to be true, but all Christ requires of Tennyson is to accept and follow him in seeking God’s will and learning to love God and others with an attitude of humility and service. One of Tennyson’s famous verses within the poem is, “’Tis better to have loved and lost, / Than never to have loved at all” (LXXXV 3-4).

Some avoid getting close to others because they do not want to experience the pain of separation. Tennyson says people need to experience love, and losing that love actually can make the bond even stronger. Tennyson says, “Love is and was my Lord and King” (CXXVI 1). Since God is love and Christ is the personification of love, Tennyson is expressing that Christ is his Lord and King. Through his *In Memoriam* experience, Tennyson expresses that he has “loved deelier, darklier understood” (CXXIX 10). The deeper Tennyson loves, the less he understands it because it is not a rational experience. Love is in the heart and is an intuitive, spiritual expression
that transcends his comprehension. Talking to his dear spiritual brother, Arthur Hallam, Tennyson says, “My love is vaster passion now; / Tho’ mix’d with God and Nature thou, / I seem to love thee more and more” (CXXX 10-12). That is the way it should be: love is something that should grow and flourish, transcending even the confines of the grave. Tennyson’s doubts lead to faith but ultimately they become a conduit of love as well: “What slender shade of doubt may flit, / And makes it vassal unto love” (XLVIII 7-8). Although doubt was a powerful force in Tennyson’s life, in the context of love, it is a “slender shade” at best.

The faith that fills Tennyson’s life after the *In Memoriam* experience is deeply intrinsic and active. Journeying through “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23: 4) and wrestling with doubt increases rather than diminishes Tennyson’s faith. Basil Willey has a very insightful commentary on this issue:

> The object of Faith is a Power that dwells in darkness and cloud as well as in light, and a man who has never doubted cannot possess that tensest kind of faith which consists, not in doubt’s non-existence, nor even in its annihilation, but in believing in despite of it, and dwelling in ‘tracts of calm from tempest made.’ (Willey 98)

Faith is there for Tennyson at all times even when it seems to be absent. It would have been hard or impossible for Tennyson to develop a deep faith in God and remain positive and calm during difficulties without having experienced doubt and despair. Trials brought Tennyson closer to God. As much as evil seeks to destroy good, evil only strengthens the good ultimately. In the same way, as much as doubt seems to diminish or destroy faith, it actually has the opposite effect. Doubt builds character and creates positive changes. According to John Patrick Shanley, author of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Doubt*, “It is Doubt (so often experienced initially as weakness) that changes things. When a man feels unsteady, when he falters, when hard-won knowledge evaporates before his eyes, he’s on the verge of growth…Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present” (Shanley viii). Tennyson certainly felt unsteady after
losing Hallam, and his intellectual world was turned upside down. New scientific discoveries and all the other major changes that were taking place in Tennyson’s world were shocking, and he had a difficult time adapting to change. However, doubt paved the way for Tennyson to “reenter the Present,” get on with his life, and live with a fuller measure of faith, hope, and love. Shanley says, “There is an uneasy time when belief has begun to slip, but hypocrisy has yet to take hold, when consciousness is disturbed but not yet altered. It is the most dangerous, important, and ongoing experience of life. The beginning of change is the moment of Doubt. It is that crucial moment when I renew my humanity or become a lie” (Shanley ix). Tennyson’s religious faith and beliefs were challenged, and he felt himself slipping into despair. But, Tennyson confronted those doubts squarely in the face and did not seek to run away from new knowledge and revelations. He embraced change and refused to flee from his fears and become a hypocrite. Tennyson’s heart and life were transformed through doubt, and he definitely renewed his humanity through becoming a more caring and compassionate person.

Tennyson experienced some deeply intensive trials after losing Hallam. His whole world was shattered, and he struggled to pick up the pieces. Towards the end of In Memoriam before the Epilogue, Tennyson reflects, “And all is well, tho’ faith and form / Be sunder’d in the night of fear; / Well roars the storm to those that hear / A deeper voice across the storm” (CXXVII 1-4). Tennyson may have had the hymn, “When Peace, like a River,” in mind when he composed these verses. The hymn was composed by Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888) who lived during Tennyson’s time. The end of the first verse of this hymn says “It is well, it is well with my soul.” This, in essence, is what Tennyson says as well. Despite the stormy waters he has traversed, his final comfort is expressed as “all is well with my soul.” Tennyson went through some tough times and suffered a great deal of adversity. But, like gold that has been refined in the fires to
remove impurities, Tennyson’s faith was galvanized into his heart and life (I Pet. 1: 6-7).
Tennyson was tried by the powerful forces of doubt, and although there was chaos and confusion in his life, as he traversed through the rough seas, he found a safe harbor and peace through Jesus, the “deeper voice across the storm.” Alan Sinfield encapsulates the In Memoriam experience: “But the poem as published in 1850 has much larger pretensions, and its readers by and large accepted them. It takes up the troublesome issues like science, religion, and political change and declares that ‘all is well’, claiming that its speculations are validated by the intensity of the poet’s imaginative experience, by love” (Sinfield 117). Tennyson confronted change and doubt and was able to overcome these forces through his intuition and imagination which connected him with Jesus Christ, the source of love and the ultimate goal Tennyson experiences and achieves.

Tennyson was not immune to suffering and tragedy. There are not any promises in the Bible that say Christians are “perfect” and will be shielded from all evil and pain. However, trials create humility, which allows God to fill people’s hearts with joy. Gerald Bruns comments that “…The basic message of Christianity is a message of hope in tragedy, by which…hope is born, almost absurdly, of despair” (Bruns 260). From a rational and logical perspective, it does not make sense that hope comes from tragedy and despair, but that is the way it works. It took Tennyson being humbled by hard times to learn to trust in God and look to him for his strength. Bruns continues, “But the sense of the poem’s impoverishment disappears when we understand that the poet’s faith is inseparable not only from love but from hope” (Bruns 260). As Paul writes in the “love” chapter of the Bible, “And now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (I Cor. 13: 13). Faith, hope, and love are the destination Tennyson arrived at through the grieving process. The Apostle Paul, like Jesus, summed up the Christian
life as love. Tennyson understood this and embraced the love of Christ as the basis for his faith and the purpose of his life. His love for God and Hallam became more mature and complete through his struggles with doubt and death, but Tennyson experienced life through death and hope in an everlasting future with his friend and Savior in heaven.
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