Of all areas of nineteenth-century English theology, none was more problematic and contentious than that concerning life after death. The centrality of the subject in the Victorian period is reflected in the sheer quantity and variety of other kinds of writing on death, and in the fact that Tennyson, the leading poet of his generation, and Newman, the greatest English Christian apologist of the age, both wrote poems which directly addressed the subject of the future life, and which were well received by a wide variety of readers. *In Memoriam* (1850) and *The Dream of Gerontius* (1865) were welcomed by Victorian readers as helpful, and specifically hopeful, religious poetry, although their interpretations of the Christian hope of eternal life are very different. Tennyson’s tentative expression of a vague ‘larger hope’ (*In Memoriam*, lv²) was later to become something of a rallying cry for F. W. Farrar, a leading churchman who, although not himself a ‘universalist’, was as hostile as Tennyson and F. D. Maurice towards what he called ‘the common view’ of judgement and everlasting punishment. In contrast to Tennyson, the confident hope expressed in the Soul’s final speech in the *Dream* is predicated on belief in Christ as both saviour and judge, and an idea of the pains of purgatory as ‘The longing for Him, when thou seest Him not; / The shame of self at thought of seeing Him’. In an age, however, increasingly troubled by the damnable or ‘fulminating’ clauses of the Athanasian Creed (which, incidentally, Tennyson’s father refused to read in church), and, in the second half of the century, by the idea of the majority of
mankind being condemned to everlasting punishment in the fires of hell, Newman’s emphasis upon purgatory as sanctification rather than satisfaction, purification rather than punishment, made some Protestant readers highly receptive to the poem’s teaching.\(^5\)

In examining these poems in the context of nineteenth-century ideas on the nature of the future life, one is constantly brought back to the fundamental question of authority, and specifically the relationship between each work and its respective authorities, or authoritative sources. Tennyson, of course, inherited his Romantic precursors’ respect for the authority of the heart, but not the authoritative voice of the Romantic poet as \textit{vates}. The Prologue to \textit{In Memoriam} (introductory stanzas written for the trial issue of March 1850) is in part an act of contrition—‘Forgive these wild and wandering cries’; and, in the lyrics that follow, Tennyson is acutely self-conscious in his acknowledgement of their therapeutic value for the ‘unquiet heart and brain’ (v). From the early lyrics of bereavement and loss, of the dark house ‘where my heart was used to beat’ (vii), through the central lyrics of doubt, where ‘the heart is sick’ (l), to the point at which

\begin{quote}
My heart, tho’ widow’d, may not rest  
Quite in the love of what is gone,  
But seeks to beat in time with one  
That warms another living breast  
\textit{(lxxxv)}
\end{quote}

the heart’s pain is written out—in both senses—in a kind of diary form.\(^6\) The poem is also a religious confession, however, and here the question of \textit{religious} authority, with which I am principally concerned, comes into view.

For Bernard Ramm, ‘Revelation is the key to religious authority.’ Whereas the Roman Catholic Church bases its doctrine of authority and its claim to infallibility upon God’s revelation (contained in the scriptures and in oral tradition) and his ‘one true Church’, the Protestant principle of authority is defined by Ramm as ‘the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures’: ‘there is an external principle (the \textit{inspired} Scripture) and an internal principle (the witness of the Holy Spirit). It is the principle of an objective \textit{divine} revelation, with an interior divine witness.’\(^7\)

The antithesis between Catholic and Protestant positions was