



# **Victoria University Of Bangladesh**

**Name: Ibnur khan**

**Program: BA In English**

**Student ID: 1822510041**

**Course Title: 19th century English Literature**

**Courese Code: ENG 309**

***Answer to the question no: 1***

The poem expresses a crisis of faith, with the speaker acknowledging the diminished standing of Christianity, which the speaker sees as being unable to withstand the rising tide of scientific discovery. New research and intellectual inquiry cast doubt on humankind's central and special role in the universe. Written during the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" admits to and laments the loss of religious faith that came with advances in various fields at the time: evolutionary biology, geology, archeology, and textual analysis of the Bible, to name a few. The poem senses the turn of a historical epoch and finds this change echoed in the transitional figure of the beach—the blurry border between land and sea. The poem thus asks the reader to consider what is lost in humankind's movement away from the (debatable) certainties of Faith. For the speaker, loss of faith equates to loss of certainty. The Dover beach itself seems to embody this loss, both in its sights and its sounds. At first, the poem offers no clues that its main subject is the loss of faith. Instead, it begins by describing the atmosphere in which the speaker stands. The descriptions of the sea and the sound of the pebbles on the beach are lyrically beautiful at first, but they mask "the eternal note of sadness" that is revealed at the end of stanza 1. This sudden intrusion of sadness hints at the speaker's sense of loss, which finds fuller expression later in the poem. Through the symbol of the sea, the poem suggests two key ideas: firstly, that major shifts in the fabric of society occur subtly—the beach's slow, repetitive movements symbolize the gradual but inevitable loss of faith that the speaker senses in this historical moment. Secondly, mapping the loss of religious faith onto the movement of the waves implies that these kinds of historical changes come in cycles—waves, in other words. Indeed, the speaker imagines the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles hearing the same sadness in the sea that the speaker hears now. That is, the speaker sees an analogy between the irrelevance of the classical Greek Gods in the speaker's time with the coming irrelevance of the Christian God in the near future. That doesn't mean that religious faith will return, but more that something will come along to take its place (in this case, the dominance of science). The speaker's position on this loss of religious faith becomes clear in the third stanza. Faith once made the world "full" and "bright"—that is, it offered comfort and joy in its certainty. Its loss, then, represents "melancholy." What's more, the "Sea of Faith" once touched the shores of the entire world, but is now "withdrawing." The poem is essentially saying that this loss of faith is global, in turn suggesting the vast reach of scientific advancements at the time. The speaker

doubles down on the idea that scientific advancement represents a loss rather than a gain in the poem's final couplet, saying that the new era will herald "confused alarms of struggle and flight," and "ignorant armies clash[ing] by night." In other words, the speaker believes that scientific advancement will bring only scientific—not spiritual—certainty and will lead to more doubt and questioning (which is, in fact, an important part of the scientific method of inquiry). Overall, then, the poem expresses a kind of resignation. The speaker fully admits the change that is in process—it is as inevitable as the waves rising and falling—and challenges the reader to consider whether this loss of faith is progress or a wrong turn. "Dover Beach," then, is a deeply pessimistic poem that questions the dominant values of its day and embodies the sense of grief that some felt at the prospect of the loss of religion. This questioning still stands up in the 21st century, calling on its readers to examine whether their own lives are spiritually fulfilled.