The Architecture of Faith

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Faith, as a way of existing, has a habit of slipping out of one's hands. On one hand, the believer, the man of faith, has difficulty in expressing for others the specific and essential character of his faith, and, as can be seen from many accounts, frequently, he has difficulty in existing "in faith" continuously. On the other hand, for the student of religion, faith is also an evasive concept. Faith, as a way of being, is neither perceptable nor rational; therefore, it is difficult to make direct statements about faith. Consequently, there are many people who choose not to believe in faith at all. Yet there are others who still claim that faith exists, and that it plays an important role in their lives. I confess that I belong to this category, though only as a student here, and as such, I shall attempt to examine the comprehensible nature of faith in the following discussion.

In 1974, James W. Fowler wrote in "Faith, Liberation, and Human Development" that "Faith is that way of knowing or construing by which persons or communities recognize themselves as related to the ultimate conditions of their existence." Fowler has constructed a definition that can be applied cross-culturally, and in or out of a religious context. I include this definition for several reasons. One, any definition of the phenomena of faith, and there are very many, is going to somehow include this idea. In this discussion, it provides a general, working definition to which we can refer. Finally, in the conclusion, I shall return to this definition as a means of evaluating what has been discussed.

This essay includes four perspectives on faith. Søren Kierkegaard is an existential Christian thinker and poet; his
time the mid-nineteenth century. Wystan Hugh Auden is a Christian poet; his time, for the purpose of this discussion, is the late 1930's and early 40's. Erich Fromm is a social psychologist; his time is immediately following Auden's. And finally, because faith is, as we shall see, a subjective topic, my own views are included, and my time is, of course, the present.

My intention in this essay is to examine the elements of contemporary Christian faith as they are demonstrated in a text, a long poem by W.H. Auden called "For the Time Being." Auden wrote this poem as a means of working out his views on faith, and Kierkegaard was his principle influence at the time. Before discussing the poem, it is necessary to outline Auden's personal situation, his historical situation, and his intellectual situation (Kierkegaard). Erich Fromm will be introduced later as a contrasting perspective on similar existential problems.
A treatment of the religious thought of a major poet offers many interesting possibilities. A poet dedicates his life's effort to the expression of the dramatic conflicts of his age. His vocabulary is vast, not only in words, but in thought, image, emotion, and belief. We assume that a serious poet represents a viewpoint that is deeply studied and deeply felt, and a view both personal and universal, like his art. Poetry serves us because it identifies the subjective visions that we have experienced but not expressed. Auden is a paradigm for such a poet. Certainly, a much longer study could be made of his religious thought, but here, the focus is on a single work, "For the Time Being."

Along with Yeats and Eliot, Auden is considered to be one of the masters of modern English poetry. Extremely accomplished at wedding the language to every kind of verse and lyric, Auden is universally acclaimed as a craftsman. But there has been some debate regarding his integrity, and hence his importance, as a thinker. The cause of these claims of inconsistency is a major shift in Auden's position in 1939-40. At this time, Auden left his native England to reside in America, and he converted to Christianity. However, most recent criticism has made sense of Auden's metamorphosis. In view of his whole career, Auden's concerns seem to remain constant; his position changed in accordance with his search for existential definition, especially in regard to love. Love is used here in the broadest sense of the word: the relationship between individuals. "Essentially the direction of Auden's poetry has been toward defining the
concept of love." Assuming this to be true, the question is: what problems did Auden encounter in this period that led him to this major shift in position, to his inquiry into the nature of faith, and to his conversion to orthodox Christianity?

First, allow me to outline what is open to speculation, and what is not, when discussing the faith of a particular individual. Regarding Auden's conversion: we cannot pin down the time and the place, but let us say that it developed in a "leap of faith," or else, in a series of progressive steps during the period from 1933 to 1941. It is important to keep in mind that a person's faith is essentially specific, person, private, subjective. His conversion arrived, no doubt, from personal crisis. We can only attribute a part of this crisis to external, public realities which Auden wrote about and which are available to us; i.e., depersonalization, war, the failure of ideals, the threat of totalitarianism, etc. Still, there must have been forces at work upon W. H. Auden of an entirely personal and private nature. (No doubt, any of us can see that we each have our own set of personal "living problems," in addition to, the specific problems of the "times" and the more abstract "human problems" that confront the existing individual. We must never oversimplify by pronouncing any set of forces essential. All contribute. We must keep in mind that our discussion of the "crisis of faith" is about the latter classes of problems, contemporary and universal, but at the same time, there are, for every existing individual, personal living problems of an idiosyncratic nature, and though hidden, they are an equal share of the forces that lead one to a "leap of faith," or the need for faith.) Of these, we can say nothing; they are not
clearly demonstrated in Auden's poetry or prose. What is open, however, are the forces that affect the individual as he exists in time, and as he exists in the present age. What does Auden have to say on this?

Born in 1907 in York, England, Auden enjoyed an upper-middle class upbringing. He received his preparatory education at schools typical of the professional class, and he attended Christ College, Oxford, in the years 1925 - 1928. At Oxford, Auden's interests were secular; he writes in 1922 that he has "lost his faith." However, as critics have pointed out, his interest in biology, geology, and psychology, in Auden's case, were evidence of an inner search for meaning and order, a quest clearly reflected from his earliest poetry. In the years after Oxford, the main events of Auden's career were as follows: 1928 - 29, spent a year studying and writing in Berlin; 1930 -35, schoolmaster at English prep schools; 1936, visited Iceland; 1937, visited China; 1938, visited Spain; and in January, 1939, Auden moved permanently to America.

During this decade, 1929 - 1939, Auden achieved fame as a serious young artist. So important had his work become that a whole generation of younger poets was referred to as "The Auden Group." Auden's poetry was secular, and it was composed of two main directions: 1) examining the decaying social order left behind in the aftermath of the Great War; 2) finding new directions (such as new definitions of love and the city) for the changing social order.

In the former mode, Auden tended either to be satirical, in which he described the ironies and eccentricities of the social vestiges of the nineteenth century, or serious, in which
he dissected the injustice and the isolation of living in the industrial age. He possessed a tendency to diagnose the causes of loneliness and depression in vignettes of individuals' lives. In the latter mode, Auden was very much influenced by Freud and Marx. He, with his peers, foresaw an age in which self-evident ideals would manifest themselves in a new society. All of these qualities portrayed Auden as somewhat of a new hero among young intellectuals like himself. His trips to the wars in China and Spain furthered his popular image as a left-leaning social poet, but clandestinely, these experiences helped contribute to an inner crisis that was beginning to take shape.

Events and experiences in his life conspired to disrupt his world view which was a kind of self-described "liberal humanism." More than most people, Auden was more keenly aware of the coming crisis of events that would preclude the implementation of liberal, humanitarian ideas. He was, during this period, a social poet, sensitive to the subtle changes in the relations between individuals and nations. During his frequent trips abroad, he witnessed first hand the effects of political propaganda and war. He corresponded with many friends that he had made in pre-Hitler Germany who were now experiencing the rise of Nazi power, and he had a foretaste to war's aggression reporting the Sino-Japanese War and the Spanish Civil War. Where he had once been a poet that sought a sweeping social revision; how the order and the meaning, that he thought men capable of, was rapidly deteriorating. Auden never felt that poetry could effect social or political change, rather, he viewed poetry as a means to report and to examine the world. However, by the close of the thirties, Auden's vision led him to despair. The
values, that he had believed were self-evident and attainable, were actually disappearing. The world crisis proved that the control of events was not always available to individuals or nations. He began to believe that his personal sense of despair, for which he sought an answer, was also a symptom of modern man in general.

At this point, at the brink of a world war, Auden moved to America and converted to Christianity. Two accounts of this period, by Golo Mann and Anne Fremantle, respectively, follow:

In 1938 to 1939, in America, he underwent a change. Perhaps his reading may have played a part in this, in particular Reinhold Niebuhr's great work, The Nature and Destiny of Man, which he studied and to which he devoted one of his most deeply considered pieces of criticism. Fundamentally, however, Auden never allowed himself to be led by others; he picked out of books what he needed for himself and digested it to an extent which justified him, subjectively, in claiming it as his very own. At this period, I heard him say one day: "The English intellectuals who now cry to Heaven against the evil incarnated in Hitler have no Heaven to cry to; they have nothing to offer and their protests echo in empty space."4

When we met, I asked him what made him come back to God, and he replied "I was always lucky with God. You see, I was a choirboy, and so I always enjoyed singing, and I was a boat boy. So even when I got bored with God, I always enjoyed his worship." "What made you come back?" I repeated, and he replied,"Partly Charles Williams, though we never discussed it. And then Hitler. At sixteen I had no need of a theological basis for my nice liberal views - everybody had them. But then when Hitler came along there had to be some reason why he was so utterly wrong. Also, when I was in Spain during the Civil War and all the churches were shut, I realized I didn't like it. I wanted them to be open. I didn't at that point want particularly to pray myself, but I wanted people to be able to."5

Now there are several points that we can make about Auden's conversion. He began to give up his agnostic position during a series of experiences in the late thirties.
was searching for a specifically religious answer; he was reclaiming his lost faith. As early as 1933, Auden wrote that he saw for the first time what it meant to "love one's neighbor." Also his meeting Charles Williams, a man of faith, was a profound influence. In his presence, Auden recalls, "I felt transformed into a person who is incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving." Auden's religious view was developed subjectively. He was influenced by religious thinkers, such as Niebuhr and Kierkegaard, but he always incorporated their ideas into his own world view. Also, he considered his entire personal history to have bearing on his faith. Finally, the single most contributing factor to his return to Christianity was his response to totalitarianism. What Auden had witnessed in Spain and China, and especially in Germany, the rise of Fascism, destroyed his former, secular views. Remember that Auden felt close to Germany; he had lived there for a year; he corresponded with friends who lived there during the thirties; and he respected German culture and industry.

Confronted by such a phenomenon, it was impossible any longer to believe that the values of liberal humanism were self-evident. Unless one was prepared to take a relativist view that all values are a matter of personal taste, one could hardly avoid asking the question: "If, as I am convinced, the Nazis are wrong and we are right, what is it that validates our virtues and invalidates theirs?"

Therefore, the transformation of what he saw as a reasonable notion, a paradigm of modern industrialized society, to a totalitarian barbaric state had the effect of leveling his prior world view. Auden's situation may be summed up: chiefly in response to totalitarianism, Auden was left without a rational worldview with which to explain or evaluate existence;
he believed that an Absolute Truth could be found in religion, and therefore, religion should be freely available for its social value.

His poems from this period demonstrate how Auden felt about the historical situation. In "September 1, 1939," Auden has written a poem revealing the despair and hopelessness of existing on the brink of war. He has spent almost a year in America: "All the conventions conspire / To make this fort assume / The furniture of home." He feels that this is the cycle of events turning down again. Man had constructed a world that he hoped would be beautiful, only to have it futility turn against itself. There is a fatalistic sense of there being no alternative. Yet despite this gloomy destiny, Auden hopes (at this point he doesn’t know exactly how) to be a guide for others:

May I composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleagured by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

 Auden’s secular view of man has changed: here he describes man according to Christian tradition, as composed of Eros (self-love) and of dust (flesh). If an answer is to come, then it must be in spirituality,

Another example of Auden’s poetry that indicates this kind of searching is "The Labyrinth," which was written in 1940. The poem describes being lost in a maze; here the maze is one of metaphysical speculation:

His absolute pre-supposition
Is - Man creates his own condition,
This maze is not divinely built,
But is secreted by my guilt.
The centre that I cannot find
Is known to my Unconscious Mind;
I have no reason to despair
Because I am already there.

This passage reflects Auden's earlier position, that man possesses Absolute Truth, but that it is hidden from consciousness. Psychology, particularly as represented by Freud and Jung, plays an important role for Auden, but because it too is limited by ego-consciousness, it cannot help man out of the maze, (is, out of his existential dilemma). Such paths are simplistic and relative explanations; without deeper spiritual knowledge, man is left with only the immediately perceptible.

All statements about what I feel,
Like I-am-lost, are quite unreal;
My knowledge ends where it began;
A hedge is taller than a man.

There is a grim irony present in these poems: man cannot know the Absolute by reason or perception; his faculties are incapable of discovering his own nature. In "Autumn 1940," we can see this irony expressed in the passage:

Oh what sign can we make to be found? How can
We will the Knowledge that we must know to will?
The waste is a suburb of prophets,
But few have seen Jesus and so many
Judas the Abyss.

Auden is suffering from the paralyzation of the will. Nothing can be known or constructed to free the will. As yet, it seems that he hasn't found that "other possibility," what it means to know by faith. To him, it seems that very few individuals have faith; most people exist in despair.

Finally, in "Christman 1940," written shortly before Auden began writing "For the Time Being," Auden seems to have found faith. He still finds the world, his historical situation, abominable; however, he definitely believes in a spiritual alternative. Man is capable of discovering "that holy center
where all times' occasions are refreshed." Faith is possible by human effort, and it makes sense out of human events:

And he who works shall find our Fatherhood.
And Fate by Faith is freely understood.

Auden understands faith to present a clear choice: either to believe in the Ultimate or in the relative. Faith in the relative has brought about the world crisis:

We are reduced to our nakedness:
Either we serve the Unconditioned,
Or some Hitlerian master will supply
An iron convention to do evil by.

Modern man suffers from spiritual emptiness; by believing in the relative or the conditional, he has made himself susceptible to the poorer and darker sides of his nature. The Void, or the Abyss, is understood as "infinite possibility," which without faith in God, becomes an orderless, uncontrollable, evil force. Negation, or the negative Void, has no power of its own; it needs man's assent in belief, and once harboured, it, through man, is capable of horrors. Auden believes that by reestablishing faith in the Absolute, man will become himself again, and that value and purpose will be restored in the actual world. So Auden has determined that man is responsible for the kind of world he lives in, and that man determines his world by the kind of faith he has, i.e. by the way he relates himself to the ultimate conditions of his existence.

Auden was influenced by Reinhold Neibuhr, whom he knew personally. With Neibuhr, Auden believed that the modern crisis was derived from a loss of faith. The problem was not economic or political, but man himself. The liberal humanism that Auden had upheld - which had developed out of the nineteenth century idealism that Kierkegaard had opposed - failed to uphold
its own ideals. Reason alone was never enough to maintain the continual progressive civilization of society. Man had obtained a "delusive security" by making false gods of science, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. "The science and reason that enabled man to "comprehend" the universe, if taken as ultimate, destroy themselves and men along with them."³ The cycle of human pride was repeating itself: when times are good, man forgets God and turns to human or rational comforts and escapes; when times are bad, man returns to God. Without God, man suffers from a devaluation of society; he becomes a victim of his own limitations and disorder. So Auden is committed to making faith in God meaningful to himself and to others, and in addition to a personal motive (of gaining salvation or an authentic existence), he was concerned with the effects of faith on society.

The rise of totalitarianism obviously had a very important influence on Auden, and of course on many other thinkers at this time, for example, Erich Fromm. Nazism was sudden madness after centuries of Reason; it demanded diagnosis. For myself, it is difficult to imagine what it was like to confront the reality of the Third Reich in 1941. However after reading Karl Bracher's treatment of the period⁹, before reading either Fromm or Niebuhr, I wrote down what I thought was the cause of Hitler's rise to power:

It seems clear to me that the fault lies in the individual himself, not in any failure of groups within Germany or among any of the other European powers. True, political parties and other nations were in a position to stop the Nazi rise to power and its subsequent actions, but they were unable to evaluate the seriousness of the situation or to act cohesively to provide a front of opposition. Their own inherent problems and ideologies stood in the way of cooperative intervention, as well as, the Nazi illusions of legality and false promises and information, which
served to confuse their view of the Nazi rise to power. Instead it was a failure of individuals in Germany, though not at all a failure of the "German citizen," derived from a fault in the German character, but rather a fault of the individual human psyche, which allowed Hitler to assume total control over the German state. The individual not only was fooled, but he actually, in many cases, wanted the totalitarian government because of inner psychic reasons, such as: the need for identity and security; "the escape from freedom;" the need to believe and have faith; the need for an enemy, or a scapegoat for social and economic ills, or the release of personal frustration. As history bears out, in giving up personal freedom, the individual suffered a worse condition in all of the areas in which he originally had hoped for a solution. Nazism ultimately shattered the German state, as well as, any kind of cohesive belief, faith, identity, religion, or personal freedom of choice for those that lived under it. In submission, the individual sacrificed any chance of finding meaning in his life, when it was just this sense of meaning that he was seeking. On the surface, it was impossible to gauge the power of the Nazi regime because there was no means to evaluate the psychological hold that Hitler and the Nazis had over the people of Germany.

Auden, and we will see now, Kierkegaard underscore the responsibility of the individual for the kind of society he lives in. The phenomenon of totalitarianism and the threat of global conflict are as alive today as they were in 1941 when Auden began writing "For the Time Being." If faith is essential for 1) ordering the individuals' mind, and 2) enabling him to live authentically and responsibly, then the question of faith becomes urgent. More than an investigation into the economic, social, or psychological conflicts which threaten the quality of life, religion may hold more lucid imperatives for social action.
"Though his writings are often brilliantly poetic and deeply philosophic, Kierkegaard was neither a poet nor a philosopher, but a preacher, an expounder and defender of Christian doctrine and Christian conduct." 10 The speaker is W.H. Auden in the introduction of a selection of Kierkegaard's writings which he edited. There are several levels on which Auden related to Kierkegaard, but the most important identification was as a preacher. "The task of the Christian preacher is to affirm the Christian commands and arouse the consciousness of sin, and secondly, to make the individual's relationship with Christ real, that is, contemporary." 11 The two principle elements of Kierkegaard's preaching, and Christ. Malcolm Diamond calls Kierkegaard "the most Christ-centered thinker in Christian history," 12 and I shall add that he is the most choice-oriented thinker in Christian history. When Kierkegaard talks about faith, he talks about it in the orthodox conception "to choose Christ." The originality and the insight of his entire works were directed to making this simple command real and contemporary for Christians.

Both Auden and Kierkegaard were masters of the written word. Kierkegaard always referred to his occupation in life as "a poet," and he, like Auden, was explicit about his intention as an author, not to provoke or instruct, but to edify, to uplift. 

To understand Kierkegaard, one must realize that he was reacting strongly to the ideas of his age, the mid-nineteenth century. The intellectuals of the period looked ahead to social utopias; science and reason could and would explain existence and the universe. Hegel had just completed his systematic philo-
sophy; popular thought looked one hundred years into the future to a perfect society, a civilization based on peaceful progress and technology. This was the age that brought forth the liberal, humanistic idealism that Auden inherited in the early twentieth century. So Kierkegaard was prophetic of man's misdirection, of the failure of contemporary ideals, and of the emergence of numerous twentieth century ideas, such as: existentialism, depth psychology, depersonalization, the theology of crisis, and "the escape from freedom."

The following treatment of Kierkegaard's thought is organized according to the chapter headings of Auden's anthology. We shall try to be specific and direct in discussing Kierkegaard's system of "choosing Christ," and to set up some useful terms that will serve our discussion.

The Present Age

Kierkegaard described an age in which men have, to a large extent, dispossessed their individuality and their freedom. This has come about via social "leveling" in which individuals become relatively equal, and by "reflection", in which individuals determine their identity by looking at objective standards, group behavior, and social structure. The group is considered a higher authority than the individual. But, Kierkegaard points out, a group has no personality or will of its own; it has no passion; it cannot make decisions. "The public," or the abstract group, is a modern myth; it doesn't exist in time; it is total abstraction. Yet it is proclaimed the authority for individuals. "When an age is reflective and passionless and destroys everything concrete, the public becomes everything and is supposed to include everything." 13 A mass of non-persons cannot own anything nor can...
it produce anything of value; it is a non-entity, hence it cannot be represented or reviewed.

A public is everything and nothing, the most dangerous of all powers and the most insignificant: one can speak to a whole nation in the name of the public and still the public will be less than a single real man however unimportant. 14

By contrast, Kierkegaard believes that the individual, because he exists in time freely choosing his actions, because he is like no other, because he can love, is the only source of value in society. The particular, the concrete, is infinitely higher than the universal, the abstract. When a man identifies himself by reflection in a group, he forfeits his ability to become self-determined; he becomes instead, a something-in-general. Modern man is, by and large, an observer, without passion or will, who looks outwardly to determine himself. This kind of man is not only unhappy, in spite of the illusion of having everything, but he is incapable of having faith because he is unwilling to believe passionately. So Kierkegaard believes individual freedom is essential to the Christian; hence he is opposed to social oppression and total authority.

The Three Stages

Every man lives either aesthetically, ethically, or religiously. In other words, these are three possible world views, and they represent the world views of three developmental stages in history. Each of these stages corresponds to the way an individual or community relates to their ultimate conditions of existence. In the aesthetical stage, man is an innocent; beauty and passion are the principle values. Man attempts to behave in a continuous way with nature; he is not free in that he is bound to instincts. This view ultimately leads to despair because: (1) the natural
way to exist is not a necessity nor can it be definitively determined; (2) all men must die, i.e. they are arbitrarily subject to fate and (3) man learns to distinguish between good and evil.

In the ethical stage, man tries to live according to an idea of the good. Man believes that through reason he can discern the good, and in turn, he can formulate ethical laws governing his behavior and choices. Kierkegaard says that this view leads to despair because: (1) it leads to a sense of failure and guilt because man cannot always live up to the good; (2) it subjects the individual to the legal and to authority; and (3) it cannot explain the lack of will and good in some people, even though they are reasonable.

The aesthetical system focuses on action, the ethical on intellect. Science is really a child of the aesthetical worldview, i.e. it accepts the world of appearance as final and looks for answers in external reality. Philosophy is a child of the ethical in that it attempts to formulate a reasonable structure of laws that embody universal truth, i.e., the good. Because both science and philosophy cannot transcend their relative fields—perception and thought—the aesthetical and the ethical cannot answer the ultimate questions of the individual. For example, ethical reflection, which is really an extension or category of natural thought, can only go so far (to the limits of the intellect) to realize eternal ethical truth. Faith is required to bridge the gap between finite human capabilities and the eternal. Without faith, ethical reflection leads only to despair, for it cannot provide the individual with the relationship to, and hence the redemption by, his creator.
knows, the limits of the universe, still only comprehends a very large series of objects. Subjectively, however, we can, by passionate belief, relate to infinity, even though we cannot comprehend it. "An objective uncertainty held fast in the appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for the existing individual." 16 For Kierkegaard, this inwardness, this subjectivity, is the only way of "knowing" faith.

"To be" has come to be defined in terms of what it means for objects to exist, i.e. "to be" in space. "Only that which can be perceived by the senses and rationally ordered with a scientific (or rational) system of concepts, is. Everything else simply is not." 17 Obviously, such a view precludes any relational idea or value, such as, love, freedom, and of course, God. But, says Kierkegaard, and all existentialists after him, man exists differently than objects; he "is" in time. Any view which denies the existence of such relational ideas, as love or faith, on the basis that they are not perceptible or explainable, is an objective insanity. Man acts and thinks in an historical situation; he "is" in the present moment.

This constitutes a subjective existence, which includes infinite possibility, and hence, love, freedom, and a relationship to God. Objective truth exists in space, so it is unchangeable, static, but also limited and relative. Subjective truth exists in time, from moment-to-moment, so it is constantly moving, changing, and evolving. This is the nature of human truth; it is a "dynamic view of truth, as that which is tending toward unity or completeness rather than as something formed or complete in itself." 18
Because man is always related to his Creator, the problem of faith is to secure a proper relationship to God. Without the proper relationship to God, man, because he is estranged from his very existence, is in despair. Hence, man is either in the state of faith or in the state of despair. Despair has many categories, depending on how a man relates to his existence. The minimum of despair would be paganism, or the state of innocence, in which man relates to the natural world as spirit, and in which he is totally unconscious of the separation, and hence, the despair of his condition. The maximum of despair would be when man is totally aware of God, of the infinite possibility of the Absolute, and yet he is actively rebelling— he is repelled—from God. Here man consumes himself in dread, in his fear of the infinite, and God is a horrible abomination to him.

Despair is a condition of negative relation to existence. Man cannot escape his freedom; in every moment he is free to choose what he will become. "Freedom means that we have a hand in making ourselves what we are to become, but it also means that we can negate as well as affirm, we can destroy, as well as construct."20 The tragedy of despair is man's inability to destroy that part of his nature that compels him to be self-determined, to be free. Man destroys anything, he can kill himself; but he cannot die spiritually, because the spirit is immortal.

Sin comes from despair; they feed each other. Sin is basically to choose to live in accordance with the visible. "Freedom dies at that point when man tries to bring his life
religion is easy, for we have forgotten how to work. But the modern state cannot be conquered by will, for "willing binds faith." Thus, in order to attain faith, a man must become contemporary with Christ. This is possible because the Incarnation is the one event that is eternally available to man.

Every man can be contemporary only with the age in which he lives - and then with one thing more: with Christ's life on earth; for Christ's life on earth, sacred history, stands for itself alone outside history.

In relation to the absolute, there is only one tense: the present. For him who is not contemporary with the absolute - for him it has no existence. And as Christ is the absolute, it is easy to see that with respect to Him there is only one situation: that of contemporaneousness.

There are only two true reactions to Christ: offense or faith. Christ is in no sense a symbol. As such, His existence would be open to interpretation, and the meaning of His existence would be limited. Rightly understood, however, Christ is man and Christ is God, Christ, the God/Man, is a contradiction; He is infinite and eternal, and at the same time, He is finite and temporal. There can be no worldly explanation for it; Christ is an offense to reason. "Immediately, He is an individual man; but the contradiction is that He is God." 30

A contradiction placed directly in front of a man - if only one can get him to look upon it - is a mirror; while he is judging, what dwells within him must be revealed. It is a riddle, but while he is guessing what dwells within him is revealed by how he guesses. The contradiction puts before him a choice, and while he is choosing, he himself is revealed. 31

All of Kierkegaard's thought (he writes that all true Christian theology ought to have this end) comes to this single point: Christ the Offence. If reason is to be used in understanding faith, it should be employed to show that knowledge is
of no aid to faith, that faith is "that point outside the world"; and as such, it is opposite, and it negates everything immediate and worldly. Faith even negates ethical law and doctrine.

Kierkegaard calls this the "teleological suspension of the ethical." Because, in faith, man stands totally related to the Creator, he must totally yield his conception of the world, so that his faith, through his relation to God, will recreate the world according to God's conception of the world. Kierkegaard calls this moment of faith, the "instant," and the recreation of the world and the conversion of the individual, "the Fullness of Time.

The instant is that ambiguous moment in which time and eternity touch one another, thereby positing the temporal, where time is constantly intersecting eternity and eternity constantly permeating time.32

Kierkegaard's conception of "the leap of faith" addresses this problem of relating to a transcendent God. Obviously, faith requires risk. The order of risk involved is existential.

To have faith, a man puts a paradox, a contradiction, ahead of Knowledge. In other words, a man puts all of himself, totally at risk, into believing passionately in God, and this belief defines his existence. This idea of faith is very close to the way we relate through love. Faith is the way we love God in the Christian sense: with our whole heart, whole mind, whole strength, and with our whole "being". The Incarnation is understood in terms of the love relationship between Creator and creature.

The problem can be solved only if God, by coming to man in the midst of historical existence, offers a restoration of the loving relationship in such a way that the response of that and gratitude can overpower the egocentricity of the will. God bridges the chasm by taking on the form of a servant, by becoming equal with the lowliest man.33
Due to man's lack of faith, he suffers from an inability to love. "He who cannot reveal himself cannot love, and he who cannot love is the most unhappy man of all". Faith enables man to exist authentically according to this contradiction: by submitting the will to God, man is able to will freely, actively, and responsibly in moment-to-moment actions. Man is free because he is securely related to infinity and eternity in every moment. Faith works through the power of God's love. In the same way, faith enables man to love freely by accepting love as his most essential duty. Immediate love can change because it is limited and dependent; it can die, or turn into hate, its opposite, or jealousy, or habit, or despair. Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love secure against change, independent, and assured against despair. Faith makes love independent of the world for a cause, dependent on the world for an object. True love knows no limit. The action of true love is the same, be it between man and God, or between man and man. Faith makes men free, because God's love drives out man's fear of freedom, fear of infinite possibility, fear of eternity, and fear of himself. When Kierkegaard says that "love gives fearlessness", he means that the lover by his very nature makes others fearless, that wherever love is present, it spreads fearlessness, and that one freely approaches the lover (be he God or man), for he drives out fear.
"For the Time Being"

To understand Auden's poem, "For the Time Being", it is very important to place it in its correct historical context. Although "For the Time Being" was published in 1944, it was mostly written during 1941. As the title suggests, the poem takes its present, the immediate historical events, very much into account. At this time, Auden, in America, was witnessing from afar World War II's "darkest hour". America had not yet joined the Allied forces, and the Axis powers, which had control over all of Europe and much of Africa and Asia, were winning the war. The Nazi threat, both its violent power and its grim ideology, is a very real force in the poem. Perhaps Auden, for morale's sake, withheld publication for this reason. Yet to fully understand his position, it is very important to acknowledge that the outcome of the war was still an open, anxious question.

The poem is one of four longer works in which Auden worked out his religious views. So it truly represents an unfinished conception of Christian faith, i.e. an answer "for the time being". In these poems, Auden relied very heavily on the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard, though he was also influenced by other religious thinkers, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Buber, as well as secular thinkers, principally Carl Jung. In his "New Year Letter", Auden is attempting to place Christianity in the history of ideas. It is written in three parts corresponding to the three stages on life's way: aesthetical, ethical, and religious. In "For the Time Being", Auden is attempting to understand faith in terms of the history of events. The subject of the poem is twofold: the Incarnation of Christ and the present time, 1941.
stages correspond roughly to the three stages: aesthetical, ethical, and religious. In the aesthetical stage, man attempts to return to the pre-fall state, the "garden", by identification with the material. In the ethical stage, man attempts to construct his own "garden", his own vision of perfection, by his reason. Both of these approaches fail because man's vision of reality is distorted by its own limitation. Only by faith, can man restore his vision of reality, and then understand the meaning of the "garden" in his own life. This view does not diverge too greatly from that of Kierkegaard's. Auden's use of the "garden" is metaphorical. Through faith man does not return to the actual "garden", but he regains the qualities - fully natural, free, authentic - and is restored his innocence and vision, while still existing in his actual, contemporary time. The "garden" is in no sense an escape, nor is it a regression to the animal or the pre-natal state. It is a return to God and to authenticity.

For Auden to intertwine the events of the birth of Christ and the events of his present time is in keeping with Kierkegaard's idea that the Christian must become contemporary with Christ. To understand what Christ means, a man must relate the events of Christ's life to the context of his existence, which is his present time. He must ask the question: What does it mean to follow Christ today? At the same time, he must understand what it would be like to be alive in Christ's time. What does it mean to follow Christ in His day? Auden is following Kierkegaard's example in trying to make "contemporaneity" real for his readers. As a result, the action of the poem is always occurring on these three levels: in the time of Christ, in the present time, in sacred history. For example, the characters exist on three levels: as historical figures, as modern characters, as repre-
sentatives of the way of faith. The form of the poem, as a play, functions well for this kind of discussion of faith. On one hand, Auden can show how the different persons relate to the Incarnation, and how they relate to one another. On the other hand, by using his other characters as different points of view, he can keep several perspectives in discussion at once.

Advent:

The present age is filled with despair: man exists without meaning and hence without passion. "Love is not what she used to be." (13) None of the usual myths are of any help; there is nothing earthly to revitalize man. Beyond the spaces of civilization and consciousness, madness lurks, waiting, to destroy the creations of civilization and of consciousness, i.e. both the structures of knowledge and their material fruition. Evil, uncontrolled instincts, has nurtured the society of men on a large scale, and nothing that man knows can combat its advance.

The present times are taking a turn for the worse, but that has happened before. This time man no longer has an explicit relationship to God, and alone, he is unable to maintain order in the face of adversity. Without order, man is faced with the Unknown, infinite possibility: "We are afraid / Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare / Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void. / This is the Abomination. This is the wrath of God." (16) Facing the Abyss, without the Law of God to guide us, we demand a miracle because "Nothing can save us that is possible." (17) But the miracle (of redeeming faith) cannot happen until man has rejected
his attachment to the visible, the Apparent.

Annunciation:

Man's Knowledge has distorted his vision of the Real, because it has divided the self against itself and against the Actual. Auden uses Jung's typology of thought, sensation, feeling, and intuition to express man's separate faculties. Man can only use one faculty at a time to view Reality, hence his vision is distorted. Man must become integrated to approach Absolute Truth; this requires a miracle. The miracle, of course, is Christ, who offers man a way of living related to the Absolute in place of Appearance. The Incarnation makes available to man the means of living naturally, i.e. according to the fulfillment of his nature. This way, faith, Christ makes available to all men for all time. Essentially, what Gabriel proposes to Mary - choose God, God chooses you - is what Christ proposes to every individual.

Temptation of Joseph:

The way of faith is not easy; God is asking us to believe without proof in what is apparently absurd. Man's response to Christ is typified by the situation of Joseph: "All I ask is one/Important and elegant proof/That what my Love had done/Was really at your will/And that your will is Love." (29) To which the reply is: "You must behave as if this were not strange at all." (30) The nature of Absolute Truth never changes; only man will never see it as One. So to live according to the Truth, man must trust, believe, on faith: "There is one World of Nature and one Life;/Sin fractures the Vision, not the Fact;/for/The Exceptional is always usual/And the Usual exceptional./To choose what is difficult all one's days/As if it were easy,
The Vision of the Shepherds:

We never left the place where we were born,
Have only lived one day, but everyday,
Have walked a thousand miles yet only worn
The grass between our work and home away.  (47)

The three shepherds represent men of labor. A man always
realizes that there is a higher Truth than his immediate reality,
whether he posses the means to attain it or not. Identification
with society or worldly objects, or with knowledge, will never
satisfy him; man requires the Truth to be free. "But to behave
like a cogwheel/ When one knows one is no such thing,/ Merely to
add to a crowd with one's passionate body, is not a virtue.
What is real about us is that each of us is waiting."  (41)

What man is waiting for, in a sense, holding himself back for,
is the Truth, the Word of God. The Word replaces the worldly
order with the True order: "the new-born Word/ Declares that
the old/ Authoritarian/ Constraint is replaced// By His Covenant,
And a city based/ On love and consent/// Suggested to men..."  (44)

At The Manger:

Every day, every moment, is a journey toward accepting the Christ
child. When a man comes to Faith, he realizes that this is the
Truth that he was searching for all his life, whether he had been
conscious of it or not. Faith redeems life by opening man to the
Infinite and the Eternal. God's love is the great Equalizer;
the everyday become special and the special become everyday.
This meeting of opposites is reflected in the interspersion of
the Shepherds and the Wisemen. By making all men equal, inspite
of their differences, Faith enables men to love one another.
The Meditation of Simeon:

Here Auden discusses his philosophy of Faith; he draws heavily upon Kierkegaard, but also incorporates his own views. As long as man still retains some connection with immediacy, he still falls err to the Aesthetical worldview. He believes that the Fall from innocence is not irrevocable, and that he can find Truth through sensuous means. Or as long as man believes that his own knowledge can discover the Truth, he still is subject to the Ethical worldview; he falsely believes that he can, through knowledge, perfect himself or his society, so he will not give up the idea of creating a worldly "heaven". In vain, man tries, by his own means, to bring the Positive, the Infinite, and the Unconditional back into his world, but the nature of the fall resulted in man's imperfect approach to the Truth. When the Word became Flesh, it presented to man an event that was necessarily perceived as impossible, and therefore absurd. Only then would its acceptance or rejection be based upon belief (faith) and not fortune or reason.

Through the Incarnation, Christ is the God of the Old Testament, I AM, as a living human being; as an explicit, historical man, we can relate to God as Thou Art. So in the Incarnation, the religion evolves from authoritarian to existential. Now the Eternal, the Perfect, the Infinite is made available to men. It is the only event that is not contingent, so it values the rest of history. Through Christ, "we become fully conscious of Necessity as our freedom to be tempted, and as Freedom as our necessity to have faith." (54) In other words, faced with freedom, man necessarily chooses the limited or the conditional,
just around the corners of our reason. The Nazis are still winning the war. If not the Nazis, then some other evil, for there will always be some irrational, seemingly uncontrollable authority to submit to, there will always be some sinfulness to be tempted away from faith by. The "garden" is still a possibility, but it is too frightening. It is enough, for the time being, to believe in Christ, but there is no proof of positive consequences. They will come all right, don't worry; probably in a form that we do not expect, and certainly with a force more dreadful than we can imagine. In the meantime, there are bills to be paid, machines to be kept in repair, irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem from insignificance. The happy morning is over, the night of agony still to come; the time is noon; when the Spirit must practice his scales of rejoicing without even a hostile audience, and the soul endure a silence that is neither for nor against her faith. That God's Will be done, that, in spite of her prayers, God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph."

"For the Time Being" contains the three basic directions of Kierkegaard's thought with regard to the meaning of faith. (1) The object of faith is the Unconditional, which the individual can only approach subjectively, i.e. in himself and in the present moment. (2) The telos of Christian theology should be to make Christ, Himself, contemporary for modern man, so that he can respond to Christ immediately, passionately, with his whole being, etc. (3) Faith is the only way for man to realize his true nature, which is, spiritual, passionate, free, individualized, subjective; faith is the way that man fulfills his nature by an authentic existence, and it is
The principle difference between Auden and Kierkegaard is that Kierkegaard believes that the real truth for man exists only in the spiritual, while Auden believes in the possibility of one truth, but that man must approach it from different levels.

Auden argues that civilization is based upon two premises: (1) that throughout the universe there is one set of laws according to which all events and movements happen, (2) that there are many different realms or societies, and that the peculiar laws of these several realms are modifications of the universal laws. 42

Faith, for Auden, provides man with a momentary vision of the Absolute Truth, though because it is temporary, and because of the nature of Absolute Truth, man comes away from the experience with only the knowledge of certainty that there is an Absolute. The process of faith then is to be assured, by a reaffirmation of our relatedness to a benevolent Creator, that the world has an Order and that by our earthly pursuits we may fulfill our human nature in the present, while our spiritual nature is being fulfilled in Eternity.
It is interesting to me, that so many new approaches to faith evolved out of the period of Fascism; I like to imagine that as desperately as Hitler and men like him were fleeing the Truth, other men were running toward It. Erich Fromm, who left his native Germany in 1933, actually wrote "The Escape From Freedom" in response to totalitarianism. Published in 1941, it represents a view of man as a coherent being, whose three levels: the physical, the rational, and the spiritual could work together to create its own development. There is much in Fromm which is clearly parallel to Kierkegaard which I will try to outline. Their principle differences are that Fromm, as a humanist, conceives a universe without a traditional God, but it seems to me that they are both responding to the existential situation of man and that they draw parallel conclusions.

The nature of man is such that he is free, this is what makes man special. In the moment when the man-animal choose to act in an alternate way than the usual patterned course provided him by instinct, freedom was born. At the same time, consciousness began. What is usually considered to be the act of rebellion that brought to man an imperfect and a guilty being, was actually an act of faith. When man chose, he chose God, in that he chose a way of being that would evolve toward the Unconditional, rather than remaining in a Conditional state. Being free means that man must always move toward the Unknown and away from the known.
Fromm's analysis of modern freedom is tied to the idea of faith. "Psychologically, faith has two entirely different meanings. It can be the expression of an inner relatedness to mankind and an affirmation to life; or it can be a reaction formation against a fundamental feeling of doubt rooted in the isolation of the individual and his negative attitude toward life." These two kinds of faith correspond to Kierkegaard's distinction between faith, as he defines it, and despair. During the reformation, as the individual emerged from the submission of the authoritarian order of the middle ages, he felt anxious about his growing freedom. Luther's explicit definition of faith "as an indubitable subjective experience of one's own salvation" was an expression for the developing process of individuation. As man was freer to choose what kind of existence he had, gained more mobility, learned new skills, etc. he was evolving into a more particular kind of person, more differentiated from his fellow men. This resulted in the isolation of the individual. Whereas he learned to make decisions and solve new problems, he acquired a stronger sense of independence. So as freedom evolved it developed two tendencies: in the individual: independence and isolation. Independence is a growing knowledge of how to act on one's environment, "for the self is as strong as it is active." Isolation is a feeling of separation from one's environment and from fellow men.

In the modern age, man's potential for feeling independent or isolated has increased. On one hand, men are able to do countless more activities, and to know more about the nature of their world; however, modern man suffers from a lack of coherent meaning and value, and much of the quality of his activity and knowledge
is not creative or even active. When a theologian looks at the modern age and says that modern man suffers from a lack of faith and when Fromm says that man suffers from a lack of positive freedom, they are using two ideas to get at the same thing. Fromm says that the direction that man develop himself is toward an attitude that makes him spontaneous. He calls this positive freedom, but he doesn't seem to know exactly what it means or how to attain it. Faith is the answer. By accepting the fact, that the nature of one's existence is such that in every moment one is open to infinite possibility, and that in the moment that "I choose what I will become" one chooses both a definite act and also everything. For this is the true nature of faith, it is to open oneself to the infinite possibility of God, and to choose according to His Enlightenment.

Of course, in above I have interpreted Fromm's ideas a great deal. Unfortunately, Erich Fromm didn't realize how difficult it is to live always in the present. This is the goal of many religions. The problem for modern man is to discover how to be free in faith. I don't think that psychology is any help, except as it posits the idea of a soul and faith in God. The weakness of Fromm's position in 1941 is the fact that he assumes that men can live spontaneously. He even goes so far to discuss the possibilities of a society composed of free individuals. In doing this, I feel that he is wishing something that cannot happen; without the religious framework to develop faith, the individual will inevitably slip out of faith and escape from freedom in the face of anxiety. But the two points that I want to make in closing
1.) the nature of God's creation is such that an individual will be able to evolve himself according to the Absolute, toward Perfection, whenever he acts "in faith" --that is an authentic faith in an authentic God as best as we are able to understand it-- and the preservation of faith as a possibility for men is dependent on one thing only, and that is, a passionate infinity.

2.) the movement, the quest, the activity, the opening of the self to the unknown, whether or not any thing new has been created, is a sure sign that the society is developing positively, and that the possibility for faith and freedom assured.
Notes

1. Fowler, p. 3
2. eg. Frazer, C G ; in Spears, (1964)
4. Spender, S., W H Auden, a Tribute, p.101
5. ibid., p. 89
7. ibid, p. 172
9. Bracher, Karl D, The German Dictatorship,
10. Auden, W H, in The Living Thoughts..., p. 3
11. ibid., p. 20
13. Kierkegaard, (Bretall), p. 265
15. op. cit, p. 222
16. op cit , p. 129
17. Prenter, R, "Sartre's Concept of Freedom", p. 131
18. Kierkegaard, (Bretall), p. 282
20. Roberts, Existentialism and Religious Belief, p. 73
21. ibid., p 106
22. Kierkegaard, (Bretall), p, 348
24. ibid , p. 169
25. Fabro, C., "Faith and Reason...", p. 162
27. Kierkegaard, (Auden), p. 188
28. op cit, p. 409
29. op cit , p, 189
30. ibid., p. 191
31. ibid., p. 192
32. ibid., p. 173
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  --Prenter, Regin, "Sartre's Concept of Freedom", pp. 130-140
  --Collins, James, "Faith and Reflection...", pp. 141-155
  --Fabro, Cornelius, "Faith and Reason...", pp. 156-206

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