

. . . the light shines in the darkness . . .

Ever since somebody said 400 years ago: *I think, therefore I am*, there has been a dominant tendency in society for people to think that *to think* means *to exclude anything but fact* in making our judgments about what's true and what isn't true. As a consequence traditional religion, drawn as it often is from discourse that reaches beyond bare fact, expressing itself in highly imaginative, poetic ways, has been much discredited by "those in the know". I mean how can a sea as real as the Red Sea part to allow ancient Israelites to walk from one shore to another; how can that be a fact; it must be a fantasy - inaccurate at best. Of course that raises questions about so much that people take on faith. And so we live in a culture in which "those in the know" write off faith, even hope as immature. The mature person builds upon the proven calculations of reason, science. Indeed the mature person no longer even speculates about life after death, encouraging us to face up to the fact: life is finite and that's that.

Then last weekend I played some CD's and LP's for my wife Jane, who has been afflicted with dementia for the past six years. In many ways she is no longer "there", gone passive, dependent. Which struck me more than usual when I played an old Frank Sinatra LP for her with ballads from melodic times now long gone. Speaking of Frank Sinatra, my favorite Aunt Lena was one of his teenage enthusiasts when he began his career in the late 1930's. Frank's baritone put an end to Bing Crosby's dominion among crooners. I wondered what she saw in him. He must have weighed about 120 pounds, his face gaunt. But of course it was the voice that floored them – the tone so masculine, lingering upon the words, so subtle with feeling.

And then the needle fell upon his rendition of *I get along without you, very well / Of course I do*. And I looked at Jane across the room. I thought, that sounds like what a no nonsense, "face the facts" kind of guy might say – like the medical student Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses* – *she . . . picks buttercups off the quilt. Humor her till it's over*. But then the lyric continues with what I like to call a turnstile word: "except". *Except when soft rains fall / And . . . then I recall / . . . being sheltered in your arms. / . . . But* (as a rational world requires) *I get along without you very well*.

Except! One of several expressions in our language like *apart from, aside from, other than, on the other hand, however, nevertheless* that sidetrack us from whatever statement has been made; that create a pause that allows an alternative (as an alternative to finality) to occur. It's almost as if our language is not locked into a closed world, that like a mine field it is laced with words, exceptions, that detonate us into another dimension. Our language is inherently a language of faith and hope regardless of how much people would purge it of such sentiments. It's our nature. And so the lyric continues: *I've forgotten you just like I should, / Of course I have, / Except to hear your name, / Or someone's laugh that is the same / But I've forgotten you just like I should . . . // . . . Except perhaps in Spring, / But I should never think of Spring, / For that would surely break my heart in two*.

And the darkness has not overcome it.

Geoff Wood