

Introduction

*To make light is to make shadow;
One cannot exist without the other.¹*

I will give you the treasures of darkness ...²

The inhabitants of the Italian village of Gubbio were proud, if not arrogant, people. Their village was clean: their streets were swept, their houses freshly whitewashed and their orange roof-tiles well-scrubbed. The old people were happy, the children well-disciplined, the parents hard-working. From their village, perched on the side of the mountain, the people of Gubbio looked with scorn on the plains villages. They considered 'the people from down below' dirty and not to be associated with.

Now it happened that in the dark of night a shadow made its way into Gubbio and devoured two villagers. The entire population was filled with consternation. Two brave young men offered to go and kill the monster. Armed with their swords, they waited for the enemy with determination. But in the morning, the people found only their mauled bodies.

Total panic gripped the villagers. They knew this was the work of a wolf who was roaming their streets at night. To rid themselves of the problem, the village council decided to call on a holy man known for his ability to talk with animals – none other than Francis of Assisi. A delegation set out to meet with Francis to implore him to come and chase the wolf out of their peaceful village forever.

On the way back the holy man left the delegation at an intersection and went into the forest to talk to the murderous wolf.

The next morning all the villagers had gathered in the public square and were getting impatient with how long Francis was taking. When they finally saw him emerge from the forest they began to shout with joy. Walking slowly, the saint made his way to the fountain, climbed up onto it and spoke harshly to his listeners. 'People of Gubbio, you must feed your wolf!' Without another word, he got down from the fountain and left.

At first the people of Gubbio did not take this well at all. Their fear of the wolf gave way to disappointment and then anger against this useless saint. But, thinking better of it, they appointed one villager to put a leg of lamb outside his door that night. And they did the same every night. From that day forward, no one in Gubbio was ever attacked by a wolf again. Life returned to normal. And the people had become much wiser through this ordeal. They dropped their arrogant and scornful attitude towards the plains people. The presence of a wolf in their lovely village had taught them humility.

(Monbourquette, 2001, pp. 52-53)

Why this booklet?

We (the writers) have a concern for helping professionals.³ Over the past two decades we have walked with hundreds of them – listening, caring, supporting, mentoring, supervising – as well as training and equipping them. We particularly want to help practitioners better understand themselves as *persons*. Unfortunately, we continue to hear sad stories about professional meltdown amongst our practitioner friends and peers - burnout, ethical violation, personal relationship breakdown, early (and sometimes messy!) exit from professional practice, etc. This pattern – and particularly what might lie behind it - requires exploration.

Our anecdotal evidence – largely intuited through conversations with fatigued care-givers, their supervisors, and the stories of complaints against professional care-givers - suggests that, in too many of these crises, forces are at play within the practitioner of which s/he is unaware. Our view is that we could all profit from an exploration of the complexities of the soul and the multi-layered reality of personhood. Counsellors, therapists and those in similar roles need to be assisted in their journey of understanding themselves beyond the caring *persona* – the public face – so they might with confidence embrace their *whole selves*.⁴

¹ Johnson, 1991, p. 17.

² Holy Bible, Isaiah 45:3, emphasis added.

³ The term is used generically throughout to denote counsellors, psychologists, social workers, therapists and others who are involved in the delivery of professional care.

⁴ 'Whole' selves here meaning both the entire self – private and public face – and a *whole*, i.e. healed person – one who is moving towards wholeness.