

READING VAN GOGH

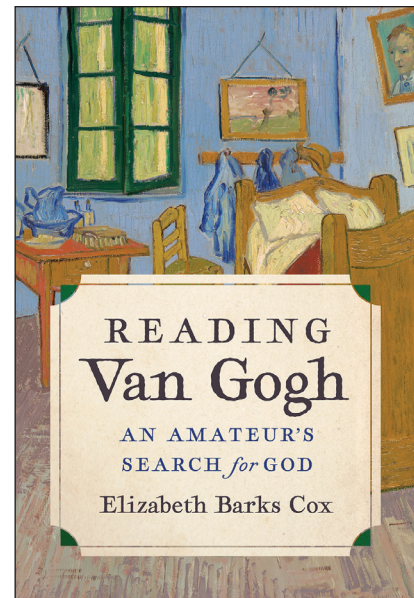
An Amateur's Search for God

by *Elizabeth Barks Cox*

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Macon, Georgia—"Elizabeth Cox writes beautiful, energetic prose, and she writes particularly well of the great human mystery of 'going in,' and of the greatest mystery, of finding there as a certainty, the great lovingness she recognizes as God," says Coleman Barks, author of *THE ESSENTIAL RUMI*. "This book is elegantly lived theology."

Vincent Van Gogh, even with his mental illness, poverty, isolation, and persistent failure, reflected compassion remarkable for his own life of rejection. He loved God. He loved beauty. He acknowledged his own shortcomings and was never as good as he wanted to be. He might be an unlikely role model for some, since he was neither saintly nor successful; but his serious attention to human suffering, as well as to beauty in the world around him, gave this author a different vision.

In a nation that lives inside the politics of the day, reveling in the constant wish to be right, or for others to be wrong, these essays might prove to be an antidote. Cox writes about her own experiences, sometimes imprudent, sometimes profound: weeks spent living in a homeless shelter in New York City, a trip to the Middle East where she visited Yasser Arafat in his compound, an unexpectedly impacting Alaskan adventure, working with abused/neglected children, and the explorations of the mind through reading. Each experience reflected and gave insight into what this author lacked, while deepening a sympathy learned from those around her, always trying to cross that bridge of understanding. One section titled "Prayer Walks" includes a more daily pursuit into a life of "paying attention."

READING VAN GOGH plunges into the ideas of psychologists, artists, poets, physicists, and fiction writers who combine reason, imagination, and experience in a way that might enlarge, or even change, the definitions we live by.

"If you are looking for a book that will take you deeply into your quest for and love of God, search no further. With eloquence, imagination and profound insight, Elizabeth Cox takes us to God via the unexpected lens of Vincent Van Gogh, and in the process deepens, expands, and enhances our understanding of both God and Van Gogh."

—*Leonora Tubbs Tisdale*, Clement-Muehl Professor of Divinity Emerita, Yale Divinity School



Author photo: Mark Olencki

Elizabeth Cox has published five novels, a collection of short stories, and a book of poetry. She has won the North Carolina Fiction Award, the Lillian Smith Award for a novel, and in 2013 she was awarded the Robert Penn Warren Award for Fiction. Cox taught creative writing at Duke University for seventeen years and has also taught at Bennington College, Boston College, and MIT. She resides in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Learn more about her at www.elizabethcox.net.

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