

VINCENT VAN GOGH: AN INSPIRED PERSON

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ABSTRACT

Vincent van Gogh is often presented as a psychologically disturbed person (cf. *Van Gogh: His sources, Genius and Influence*, National Gallery of Victoria November 1993 - January 1994).

I wish to examine five successive periods of his painting for evidence for or against this thesis. They are - Holland (1853-1886); Paris (1886-1888); Arles (1888-1889); St Remy (1889-1890); Auvers (1890).

I shall correlate this evidence (presented with abundant slides) with five key metaphors of significant human experience. They are Cry; Smile; Play; Dance; The Human.

I shall present briefly a psychoanalytic interpretation of this evidence, and suggest that it fails to do justice to the data.

I shall offer an alternative interpretation, viz. a transition from a predominantly oral/aural sensorium to a predominantly visual/colourful sensorium. This itself is symptomatic of a transition from a focus on unresolvable difference to a focus on integrative complementarity. The latter, when interpreted in a dynamic sense, may be taken as a phenomenological index of a profound inspiring of a person by the Spirit of God.

This paper wishes to suggest a convergence between aesthetics (as the study of the beautiful) and pneumatology (as the study of the Spirit) and to offer a non-pathological and non-institutionally-religious interpretation of the personality of Vincent van Gogh.

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