

THE ENNEAGRAM

I. Introduction

The Enneagram is claimed to help people to gain self-knowledge, to accept negative personal qualities and to see more clearly that people have different ways of viewing reality and reacting. It is a system used by some spiritual directors. It is a system of personality type-casting.

Today's teachers of the Enneagram often try to use only those ideas in the theory which are consistent with a Christian faith, but the Christian faith is incompatible with esoteric practices.

In the Aquarian Guide to the 'New Age' by Eileen Campbell and J. H. Brennan the Enneagram is described as 'a fragmentary science taught by G.I. Gurdjieff, who claimed, without supporting evidence, it was the key symbolic device of the Sarmaun Brotherhood, a mystic order that existed in Central Asia for thousands of years. The Enneagram is a remarkable system for clarifying and understanding human nature.'

This book describes 'New Age' as an umbrella term which is generally used to denote a whole range of interests including health and well-being, the many forms of therapy or self-help, the practice of an esoteric or spiritual tradition, concern for the rest of humanity and the environment, and respect for nature and feminine wisdom.

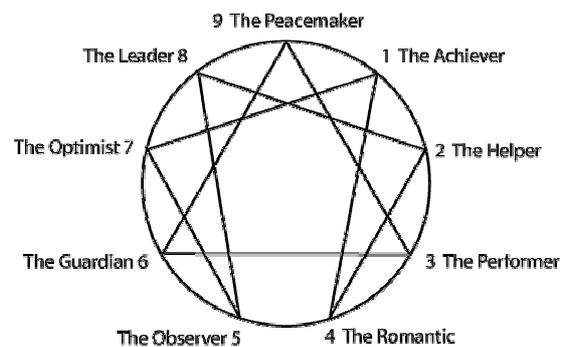
There is no evidence that the Enneagram predates its promoters.

2. The Enneagram

This name is adopted from the Greek ennea – nine, and gramma – sign.

It refers to a diagram composed of a circle with nine points on its circumference, connected within the circle by a triangle and a hexangle.

It was originally used for divination, but has become known as the symbol for a system of personality typology consisting of nine standard character types.



3. The Promoters

It became popular after the publication of Helen Palmer's book 'The Enneagram', but she recognises her indebtedness to the Russian esoteric thinker & practitioner G. I. Gurdjieff, the Chilean psychologist Claudio Naranjo and the author Oscar Ichazo, founder of Arica.

The origin of the Enneagram remains shrouded in mystery, but some maintain that it comes from Sufi mysticism.

Gurdjieff ran an occult centre at Fontainebleau, France. In his book 'Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson' Gurdjieff presents the argument that Beelzebub is not the Prince of Darkness as found in Christian theology, but a member of the cosmic circle. Gurdjieff taught about planetary influences, clairvoyance, astral bodies, kundilini and tarot cards.

Ichazo claims to have received his instructions from a higher entity or spirit called Metraton, the prince of the archangels. The members of his

group make contact with spirits such as the so-called interior master Green Qu'tub. Ichazo is a firm believer in reincarnation. He believes in the importance of drugs as a way experiencing higher, altered states of consciousness. He uses the Chinese divination tool I Ching.

During his travels through Central Asia, Gurdjieff, claimed to have learned the Enneagram symbol from the Sarmouni and Naqshbandi sects of Sufis (mystics in Muslim societies). The Sufis used the Enneagram for numerological divination; they searched for the mystical meanings of the decimals .333...., .6666....., and .9999...., which is based on dividing one by three, and of .142857, which is based on dividing one by seven and contains no multiples of three.

The Sufis did not attach a personality theory to the symbol, but when Oscar Ichazo later developed his theory around the Enneagram, he incorporated the Sufi numerology into it.

The Enneagram is a circle which is broken up into nine points. The first sequence of decimals, 9,3,6, corresponds to the triangle within the circle, and the second sequence, 1,4,2,8,5,7 corresponds to a hexagon. The lines within the circle connecting the points are an important part of the Enneagram, indicating the inner dynamics of the process it describes. Gurdjieff believed that 'only what a man is able to put into the Enneagram does he actually know, that is, understand. What he cannot put into the Enneagram he does not know.'

Gurdjieff's belief in 'demiurgic essences', spirits who are in charge of harmony on earth, also influenced Ichazo's theory of personality types.

Ichazo claims to have received his instructions from a higher entity called 'Metraton, the prince of the archangels', and members of his group contact lower spirits through meditation and mantras. They are helped and guided by an interior master, the Green Qu'Tub, who makes himself known when a student reaches a sufficiently high stage of development.

In the 1960's Ichazo developed a system of nine personality types to correspond to the nine points on the symbol. He wrote short descriptions of the nine types, employed animal symbols, or 'totems' for each type, and placed the personality types on the Enneagram symbol. One of his disciples, Claudio Naranjo, took the next step of placing the Enneagram into the context of psychological concepts, like Freud's defence mechanisms. Ichazo's enneagram

employs the numerological background of the Sufi decimal point symbolism in understanding personality dynamics.

4. Concerns

(a) Scientific Problems

There is a lack of objective scientific research into the Enneagram. How do we know that there are only nine key personality types, that the types are centred on nine distinct prides or ideals, or that they are the correct nine types? Psychologists subject their hypotheses to test that allow the results to be repeated in scientifically controlled situations and criticized by their colleagues and peers. There have been dissertations on the Enneagram but no rigorous scientific test or peer examination applied to it.

(b) Social Problems

There is a danger of believing that once we know someone's personality type we can understand his or her inner drives or compulsive behaviour. It short-circuits interpersonal relationships, enabling some people to think they 'know' another person, and that they are able to access knowledge, before that person has chosen to reveal private information. This is an invasion of privacy and could lead to an attempt to control by means of supposed knowledge.

(c) Mythological Problems

The Enneagram personality theory's authority in our lives depends on its antiquity and the presumed wealth of experience gained over the centuries. The Enneagram literature provides no evidence that it predates Osacar Ichazo although the symbol itself may possibly date back to 2500 BC.

There is an attempt to relate the Enneagram to religious language. Some teachers assert that the nine types are the nine faces of God, or upside down they are the nine faces of the devil. This is based on Ichazo's idea that when we were born we lived in our essence, or true nature; at around the age of three we develop defences to cope with our society which gave us our ego. By removing the ego, which is the main problem the Enneagram workshops try to solve, we

can return to the essence which he thinks divine. No reputable school of psychology supports this theory about the ego.

(d) **Theological Problems**

The occultic and mythic aspects of the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ichazo are incompatible with a Christian faith. Christianity is neither secret nor esoteric and is open to anyone who wishes to examine the scriptures, traditional belief and teaching. Sadly, there is an element of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism in the Enneagram.

Ichazo includes many religious and occultic strands within his system including Cabala, medieval Jewish esotericism, I Ching, a Chinese divination tool, astrological connections with the Enneagram, contact with spirits like Metraton, the Green Qu' Tub, and past masters of Sufism.

Scripture condemns and forbids mediumship, divination and familiar spirits. *'Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord. (Lev.19:31); 'If any turn to mediums and wizards, prostituting themselves to them, I will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people.'* (Lev.20:6); *'No one shall be found among you who makes his son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord...'* (Deut.18:10-12a)

5. Aims and Implications

The Enneagram is fundamentally a self-improvement technique. Gurdjieff and Ichazo believed that the goal of self-work and meditation is enlightenment or an altered state of consciousness and that one must do the Enneagram to destroy the ego trip associated with one's number and return to one's essence and the dissolution of the self.

The Enneagram claims to be a technique for self-discovery and self-improvement. It focuses upon self and not on God. It may help people to identify their sins as has been suggested by some teachers of the

Enneagram, many of whom suggest that the solution is to meditate these sins away. This is incompatible with Christian understanding:-

- The need for repentance and seeking God's grace to turn away from sin.
- We are reborn as adopted children of God.
- Our sins are forgiven.
- We are in a personal relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- A belief in the future when we choose the life Christ died to offer us with the God who loves us.
- God promises to raise us to eternal life.

6. Warnings

Father M. Pacwa, Professor of Scripture and Hebrew at Loyola University, Chicago, an authority on the New Age Movement was deeply involved in Enneagram Seminars, but now strongly warns Christians from having anything whatsoever to do with this occultic movement. He questions the claim of Gurdjieff to teach esoteric Christianity as Christianity is not secret or esoteric. Esoteric religion is usually a cover for a doctrine at odds with authentic Christianity.

Father Pacwa points to a contradiction between Gurdjieff and Ichazo and says *"on the one hand they deny that we are freewill until we attain certain stages of enlightenment which we gain through the 'work' of learning from the Enneagram. On the other hand, they teach that we should take control of our own lives to save ourselves"*. He warns *"the Enneagram personality theory is steeped in the occult...people who get heavily involved with it risk being diverted from the central aspects of their Christian faith"*.

He also points out that people who get involved with the Enneagram risk getting diverted from the central aspects of their Christian faith, that when we test the Enneagram we should use the gospel of Jesus Christ as our norm, not the Enneagram to test the truth of the gospel.

Jeremy Davies, diocesan exorcist for Westminster since 1986 says *'occult practices such as magic, fortune-telling and holding séances to contact the spirits of the dead were direct invitations to the devil. The thin end of the wedge (soft drugs, yoga for relaxation, horoscopes just for fun and so on) is more dangerous than the thick end because more*

deceptive. An evil spirit tries to make his way as unobtrusively as possible. Beware of any claim to mediate beneficial energies (eg. reiki), any courses that promise the peace that Christ promises (eg. the Enneagram), any alternative therapy with its roots in eastern religions (eg. acupuncture). Even when these panaceas are more the work of auto-suggestion than of the devil, they are not harmless. Sanity depends on our relationship to reality. What is called the New Age Movement is paganism reduced to absurdity but unfortunately it has not lost its poison in the process.'

Donna Steichen comments in her book 'Ungodly Rage' – that the Enneagram advances a negative theory which effectively states that "human personality is wholly composed of pathological elements." She continues "under those layers of delusion and illness, what do you think constitutes authentic personality?"

As a method of self-improvement the Enneagram operates without the necessity for the redeeming sacrifice of Christ on His Cross. The Enneagram places people into rigid 'types' and 'categories' (in the same way as astrologers place people under the signs of the zodiac. Jesus comes to set us free from all inhibiting limitations such as this. In Him we are **not** held captive by any categorization.

7. A Personal Testimony

The following is a personal testimony by Michael Davidson, a member of the Maranatha Community.

My experience of the Enneagram

"Many years ago, after I had a nervous breakdown, I was introduced to the Enneagram by two nuns to whose order I belonged as a Lay Associate. It helped me to understand my personality and to accept myself as being described, normal for that group of people. I started to read about the Enneagram and, although at times it seemed a bit like astrology, I accepted it when I read the book by two Jesuits who described Jesus as belonging to all types. I thought if the Jesuits approve, then it must be all right.

Two friends of mine, who also belonged to the same group with the nuns, became very involved with studying this typology and applying it to other people, which you are not really supposed to do. They recommended more books, but one, I could see, had several internal contradictions. One day, these friends verbally attacked the nuns and had a big break up. I was very upset. Then, later, my wife and I visited these friends; we talked about the Enneagram and the lady started shouting criticism and lambasting my wife about her personality type. This tirade continued for over an hour, it was awful! It took years for us to come to terms with it.

I found out that there are lots of other different systems for analyzing personality. More recently I read that the Enneagram was based on an occult foundation, so I destroyed all my books on the subject. When I discovered this I could see that, 'By their fruits you shall know them.' Although this typology seemed helpful at the beginning, it became really bad in the end."

8. Conclusion

Christians should be extremely careful before becoming involved in any activity which has its roots in the occult.

It is Christ alone who heals and saves. In the words of St Paul, *'test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do this.'* (1 Thess.5:20-24)

Source Material

Bible quotations from NRSV published by Oxford University Press

The Aquarian Guide to the New Age by Eileen Campbell & J.H. Brennan published by The Aquarian Press

The quote from 'Exorcism' by Fr. Jeremy Davies published by the Catholic Truth Society

Fr. Mitch Pacwa, SJ 'The Enneagram: Questions that Need Answers' published in New Covenant

The Enneagram published by Watchdog

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