

## Enneagram

By Marcia Montenegro

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**Founder:** For the Enneagram 9-pointed figure, Armenian-Greek mystic George Gurdjieff (c.1866-1949). For the personality “types” added later, Claudio Naranjo (1932-2019).<sup>1</sup>

**Founding Date:** The earliest usage was by Óscar Ichazo; who taught his form of the Enneagram at his occult school, Arica, in Arica, Chile, founded in 1968.<sup>2</sup> Claudio Naranjo, taught the Enneagram with personality typing at Esalen in Big Sur, California, starting in 1971/72.<sup>3</sup>

**Definition:** The word comes from Greek words “ennea” for “nine” and “gramma” for “writing” or “drawing.” The Enneagram as used today is a nine-sided diagram with nine points, each of the nine points representing a personality type. Lines are drawn connecting these points with other points. One must determine his or her type and proceed from there according to the particular teachings given. Enneagrams vary in how they are taught so there is no one standard model.

**Philosophical Basis:** Gurdjieff’s Enneagram depicted the universe and the secret laws of 3 and 7, which Gurdjieff believed defined all known reality. This Enneagram had no connection to personality types. Information for Naranjo’s Enneagram of personality was based on his “observations” but “mostly” came via automatic writing,<sup>4</sup> according to Naranjo in a 2010 video.<sup>5</sup>

### BACKGROUND

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The history of the Enneagram is complicated by the fact that it involves esoteric teachers who made unverified claims and who sometimes did not give truthful accounts of their sources.

The Enneagram began with George Gurdjieff who was a mystic and spiritual philosopher. Raised Eastern Orthodox, he left that to pursue his own spiritual journey. He and his followers claimed he had encounters with spiritual teachers, none of which was ever verified. However, both Gurdjieff and his Russian pupil, P.D. Ouspensky, had a large influence on the later New Age movement.

**Gurdjieff** devised a 9-sided figure called an Enneagon or Enneagram, which he claimed was a picture of cosmic reality and demonstrated the mysterious laws of 3 and 7 which are the basis of all reality.<sup>6</sup> This is the real, original Enneagram, which had no reference to personality traits. Followers of Gurdjieff claimed he got this from a secret Sufi brotherhood,<sup>7</sup> the existence of which has never been proven. Gurdjieff used the Enneagram as a diagram for his teachings that man is asleep and must become a “conscious” being.

**Ouspensky** (1878-1947) wrote books on Gurdjieff’s teachings called the “Fourth Way.” This included Gurdjieff’s views of the Enneagram. In Ouspensky’s book, *In Search of the Miraculous* (published posthumously), the enneagram is:

...a ‘cosmic blueprint’ — a diagrammatic representation of the fundamental laws that create and sustain everything from the whole of Creation to individual organisms. The Enneagram demonstrates the interaction of the Law of Three and the Law of Seven that gives rise to all phenomena... [and] All of Creation, the Physical world, the Subtle world, the Causal world and beyond that the Absolute – everything is contained in 9.<sup>8</sup>

**Oscar Ichazo**, a Bolivian spiritual teacher, who ran an occult school in Arica, Chile, taught the Enneagram, which he called the Enneagon. He added his own ideas of “ego fixations,” which are patterns that had to be transcended to realize the true inner “essence” of Self. It is not clear how Ichazo learned about the Enneagram but some of his students believed he had learned it from Gurdjieff or Gurdjieff’s followers.<sup>9</sup>

Ichazo claimed to be in contact with spirits named Metatron and the Green Qutb,<sup>10</sup> though he sometimes claimed these were states of consciousness. Ichazo practiced Eastern meditation, studied the Kabbalah,<sup>11</sup> and was familiar with a host of esoteric occult practices and beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

We have to distinguish between a man as he is in essence, and as he is in ego or personality. In essence, every person is perfect, fearless, and in a loving unity with the entire cosmos; there is no conflict within the person between head, heart, and stomach or between the person and others. Then something happens: the ego begins to develop, karma accumulates, there is a transition from objectivity to subjectivity; man falls from essence into personality.<sup>13</sup>

In this view, the personality (or ego) is the false self, to be transcended.

**From Claudio Naranjo to the New Age:** Ichazo's student, Claudio Naranjo, a Chilean psychiatrist and spiritual seeker, took the Enneagram teachings to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, an edgy hotbed of avant-garde psychology, New Age teachings, and experiments with psychedelics (Esalen played a crucial role in the human potential movement and influenced the New Age).<sup>14</sup> Naranjo came up with the 9 personality types.

Naranjo claimed later in a video that he and Ichazo made up the idea that the Enneagram was ancient when they knew it wasn't. Naranjo also claimed that he originated the 9 types from his observations but "mostly" via automatic writing.<sup>15</sup>

One of Naranjo's students at Esalen, the Jesuit Bob Ochs, took the Enneagram to Chicago, teaching it at a Roman Catholic seminary in 1972.<sup>16</sup> Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar who later learned the Enneagram, co-wrote with Andreas Ebert *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, published first in German in 1989, later in English in 1990 and 1991.

The Enneagram migrated from Esalen to the New Age when psychic Helen Palmer became a self-described expert on it and taught workshops and classes.<sup>17</sup> The Enneagram caught on in New Age venues and became popular with New Age therapists. The thrust of the Enneagram in the New Age was and still is a gnostic seeking of the "True Self" or "divine Self."

The Enneagram Institute (not a scholarly or academic institution)<sup>18</sup> was founded in 1997 by former Jesuit Don Riso and Russ Hudson, both adherents of New Age beliefs. The website has changed at least four times since 2011, going from obviously spiritual and New Age in orientate on to more neutral with psychological jargon.<sup>19</sup>

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## THE ENNEAGRAM AND THE CHURCH

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Many make the claim that the Enneagram started with the Desert Fathers, with a 4<sup>th</sup> century monk named Evagrius Ponticus, and/or with Ramon Llull, a medieval Roman Catholic. However, there is no evidence for this and the Enneagram cannot have existed prior to modern times due to the fact that a decimal system is needed to set up the Enneagram's ideas.<sup>20</sup>

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar who runs the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, NM, had influence on progressives Rob Bell and Brian McLaren, and continued to have influence on the developing Progressive movement in Christianity. It is the popularity of his book, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, that led to the Enneagram migrating from Progressive Christian venues into the evangelical church.

In the Preface to that book, Richard Rohr calls the Enneagram "a very ancient Christian tool for the discernment of spirits, for the struggle with our capital sin, our 'False Self,' and the encounter with our True Self in God." Ebert writes, "I believe that the Enneagram can help us to find a deeper and more authentic relationship with God—even though it was not discovered by Christians (p. xv)." <sup>21</sup> These false claims for the Enneagram were disseminated via books by Rohr's disciples: Chris Heuertz, author of *The Sacred Enneagram* (Zondervan), and Ian Cron and Suzanne Stabile who wrote *The Road Back to You* (InterVarsity Press).

Heuertz and Stabile were both mentored by Richard Rohr.<sup>22</sup> They, along with Ian Cron, speak or teach regularly at Rohr's Center.<sup>23</sup> This is significant due to Richard Rohr's heretical views.<sup>24</sup> Their books promote the belief that the Enneagram is ancient and has Christian origins, in whole or in part. They also teach about an inherent "true self" or "essence" that needs to be uncovered.<sup>25</sup>

**Richard Rohr and the Enneagram:** The concern about an invalid tool being used to discover one's self is rivaled only by an equal concern for Richard Rohr's views gaining credence through the books of his students, his own book, or the fact he has been endorsed by several Christian Enneagram speakers and teachers.

Richard Rohr teaches that creation was the first incarnation of Christ,<sup>26</sup> that Jesus and the "universal Christ" are distinct, and admits to being a perennialist and panentheist.<sup>27</sup> Since two people he mentored are authors of two of the popular Enneagram books in the church, Rohr's theological influence cannot be disregarded.

## CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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Often when the Enneagram is taught in churches; it is not as a mere personality indicator but as a way to know God, to grow spiritually, and even for sanctification.<sup>28</sup> Since much of the Enneagram teachings contain spiritual ideas are from Richard Rohr and his followers and students, the spiritual ideas as part of Enneagram teachings are, at the very least, suspect and, in many cases, outright unbiblical.

Additionally, there is a New Age influence. The fourth IVP book, *Spiritual Rhythms of the Enneagram*, has a “Gratitude” section that acknowledges Richard Rohr and 13 New Agers.<sup>29</sup> Popular Christian “Enneagram Coach” Beth McCord, names five New Agers as her teachers.<sup>30</sup>

Most assume the Enneagram is a valid personality test but it has no basis in psychological studies or research; thus making it entirely subjective and arbitrary. The Enneagram is interpreted in many different ways depending on the views of the person or schools of thought doing the interpretation.

The Enneagram’s idea of finding the “true self” is contrary to what the Bible teaches about the nature of man. The Bible’s view is that man has a sin nature and cannot act in accordance with God’s will on his own (Romans 5:12, 18-19). Rohr’s teaching on the true self is repeated by other Enneagram teachers. The true self is a “*pure diamond*” which is the “essence” that one should know as self. This was a theme of Rohr’s book, *Immortal Diamond*.<sup>31</sup> However, God clearly states that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and are without hope unless one has put his faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:5, 24-25). God’s word specifies that man’s “righteous deeds” are as a “filthy garment” (Is. 64:6).

Colossians 3:9-10 speaks of the believer having an “old self” (e.g. one’s life before Christ) and a “new self” (e.g. one’s life after trusting Christ), this is unlike the Enneagram teachings. This passage is about putting to death the former, unredeemed, self that was enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6, 16, 18), and living a regenerated life as “slaves of righteousness” (v. 18; cf. Ephesians 4:22-24). This has nothing to do with Enneagram themes on personality traits, identifying with specific sin patterns, or using a man-based tool to attain spiritual growth.

Rather than finding a true self, the Bible teaches Christians to yield to God’s word and the Holy Spirit, and to be conformed to the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:29; Hebrews 5:9; Romans 8:29). If anything, it is opposite of the idea found in the Enneagram’s “True Self.”

Attempting to find one’s “true self” or any type of spiritual or supernatural knowledge outside of God or the Bible is contrary to what the Bible teaches (Acts 16:16-18). The danger for many Christians and Christian leaders is the temptation to seek spiritual knowledge or guidance from a teacher, like Rohr, who accepts panentheism (which is a teaching is not compatible with, the Bible or a Christian/Biblical worldview).

The Enneagram fails on multiple levels to be a worthwhile instrument to gain a better understanding of self and gain a closer relationship to God. The problems with Enneagram can be summarized as follows: 1) The Enneagram is invalid because it has no support in scholarly or academic studies; therefore, there is no objective way to measure the Enneagram’s accuracy or value. 2) The Enneagram is rooted in and connected to teachings from the occult and the New Age and New Agers have influenced some Christian Enneagram writers and teachers. 3) Christian Enneagram publications propagate the false ideas that the Enneagram is ancient and has Christian origins. 4) Richard Rohr’s influence via his Enneagram book and students is a serious issue since Rohr teaches doctrines contrary to God’s word and basic Christian essentials. 5) The Enneagram’s idea of a true self is not compatible with God’s view of man. 6) The Enneagram’s popular view of God and/or Jesus as summing up the traits of the Enneagram types is not a valid depiction of God or Jesus. 7) The Enneagram can lead to replacing the use of the Bible as a discipling tool, and as a way to know God and self. 8) A false tool can never be fruitful for Christian growth or knowledge and is a bad witness for sharing the truth of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.

Christians know God through scripture, prayer, and worship. Sanctification is by the Holy Spirit as one grows in Christ. The Bible is sufficient in giving Christians the means for a mature faith and walk (2 Tim. 3:16). There is the danger of becoming self-absorbed and the danger of seeing one’s self falsely through the filter of the Enneagram instead of the Bible. The Enneagram, if relied on, may be a barrier to the Holy Spirit showing Christians where growth is needed through God’s word.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Oscar Ichazo (b. 1931), Naranjo's teacher, taught the Enneagram with "ego fixations" although some sources claim Ichazo came up with the personality types
- <sup>2</sup> Brandon Medina, "The Enneagram: A History, Part 3," Theology Thinktank, August 15, 2019. Accessed March 15, 2020, <https://theologythinktank.com/the-enneagram-a-history-part-3/>; *Enneagram*, The Skeptics' Dictionary, 1994; last modified November 21, 2015, <http://skepdic.com/enneagr.html>
- <sup>3</sup> Based on research by Dr. Ronald V. Huggins and posted at <https://ronaldvhugginsreloaded.blogspot.com/2019/11/a-brief-sketch-of-early-spread-of.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Automatic writing is when a medium's hand is allegedly controlled by an outside force to compose a "message." For more information there are number of Profiles where this practice is discussed (e.g. Channeling, Spiritualism, The Long Island Medium and Ouija Board).
- <sup>5</sup> WorkshopsatIDHBB, "The origin of the Enneagram - Claudio Naranjo speaks - June 2010." June 18, 2010, YouTube, 10:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wI03KJWnNd8>
- <sup>6</sup> "A Brief Report on the Origins of the Enneagram," National Catholic Reporter, accessed March 16, 2020, [https://nccath.org/NCR\\_Online/documents/ennea2.htm](https://nccath.org/NCR_Online/documents/ennea2.htm). a detailed history is offered in Brandon Medina, "The Enneagram: A History, Part 1," Theology Thinktank, April 17, 2019. Accessed March 14, 2020, <https://theologythinktank.com/the-enneagram-a-history-part-1/>, "The Enneagram: A History, Part 2," Theology Thinktank.
- <sup>7</sup> A separate 4-page Profile has been published related to this subject: James K. Walker, "Islam," *Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2010). A complete collection of Profiles (over 560 pages) is available at [www.watchman.org/notebook](http://www.watchman.org/notebook). This Profile is available at: <https://www.watchman.org/profiles/pdf/islamprofile.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> "Enneagram," Ouspensky Today, accessed March 14, 2020, <https://www.ouspenskytoday.org/wp/about-teaching-today/enneagram/>
- <sup>9</sup> Brandon Medina, "The Enneagram: A History, Part 3"
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. "A Brief Report on the Origins of the Enneagram," National Catholic Reporter.
- <sup>11</sup> A separate 4-page Profile has been published related to this subject: Philip Arnn, "Kabbalah," *Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2004). A complete collection of Profiles (over 560 pages) is available at [www.watchman.org/notebook](http://www.watchman.org/notebook). This Profile is available at: <https://www.watchman.org/profiles/pdf/kabbalahprofile.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> "Naranjo, Ichazo, and the School, Part One," The Enneagram...info from the underground, Accessed March 18, 2020. <https://oceanmoonshine9.wordpress.com/hidden-lore-of-the-nine-points-naranjo-ichazo-and-the-school-1/>.
- <sup>13</sup> Oscar Ichazo, *Interviews With Oscar Ichazo* (Books by Ichazo, 1982), 9, **quoted in** "The Traditional Enneagram," The Enneagram Institute, accessed March 16, 2020, <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/the-traditional-enneagram>.
- <sup>14</sup> Claudio Naranjo, "Autobiography," [claudionaranjo.net](http://claudionaranjo.net), accessed March 16, 2020. [https://www.claudionaranjo.net/navbar\\_english/autobiography\\_english.html](https://www.claudionaranjo.net/navbar_english/autobiography_english.html). Huggins, Ronald V. "A Brief Sketch of the Early Spread of the Enneagram" *Ronald V. Huggins Blog*, November 6, 2019. Accessed March 18, 2020. <https://ronaldvhugginsreloaded.blogspot.com/2019/11/a-brief-sketch-of-early-spread-of.html>; "The Tantric Shamanism of Claudio Naranjo," [https://www.claudionaranjo.net/pdf\\_files/religion/tantric\\_shamanism\\_esalen\\_book\\_english.pdf](https://www.claudionaranjo.net/pdf_files/religion/tantric_shamanism_esalen_book_english.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> "The origin of the Enneagram - Claudio Naranjo speaks - June 2010."
- <sup>16</sup> Ed Hird, "Gurdjieff and the Enigmatic Enneagram," *Edhird's Blog*, August 28, 2010, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://edhird.com/tag/fr-bob-ochs-sj/>; see also: [www.watchman.org/enneagram\\_2010.pdf](http://www.watchman.org/enneagram_2010.pdf)
- <sup>17</sup> Medina, "The Enneagram: A History, Part 3"
- <sup>18</sup> The Enneagram Institute, "About." Accessed March 21, 2020. <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/about>
- <sup>19</sup> The writer of this article observed this from her first investigation of The Enneagram Institute's website for her 2011 article on the Enneagram as she wrote other articles over the years after that.
- <sup>20</sup> Medina, "The Enneagram: A History, Part 1," and "The Enneagram: A History, Part 2," Theology Thinktank. See also: Howard A. Addison, *Cast in God's Image: Discover Your Personality Type Using the Enneagram and Kabbalah*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT: 2001. p. 93.
- <sup>21</sup> Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), xxiii.
- <sup>22</sup> Meghan Lally, "Suzanne Stabile Dedicates Her Life to Enneagram Education," *D Magazine*, August 24, 2018, accessed March 19, 2020, <https://www.dmagazine.com/health-fitness/2018/08/suzanne-stabile-enneagram/>; Zondervan heavily promoted the of workbook for *The Sacred Enneagram*, <https://www.zondervan.com/blog/2019/10/04/sacred-enneagram-by-renowned-enneagram-expert-chris-heuertz-sells-over-10000-copies/>
- <sup>23</sup> "Ian Morgan Cron," "The Road Back to You, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.theroadbacktoyou.com/ian-morgan-cron/>; "Suzanne Stabile," IVP, accessed March 18 2020, <https://www.ivpress.com/suzanne-stabile>. Chris Heuertz participation and bio from the *Conspire 2015* conference, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://cac.org/events/conferences/past-conferences/conspire-2015/>.
- <sup>24</sup> Marcia Montenegro, "Who Do You Say That I Am? An Evaluation of Richard Rohr's 'The Universal Christ,'" *Christian Answers for the New Age*, April 2019. Accessed March 10, 2020. [http://www.christiananswersforthenewage.org/Articles\\_UniversalChrist.aspx](http://www.christiananswersforthenewage.org/Articles_UniversalChrist.aspx); Jane Krammer, "Richard Rohr – Is His Teaching Biblical?" *Anglican Mainstream*. Accessed March 10, 2020. [https://anglicanmainstream.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Richard-Rohr-by-Jane-Krammer-for-AM.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0rh32x4p02gAHZtEoBVg8FWYC\\_a\\_SWvlsRRi-M3j\\_5zYQ3mBS3tPfa1S4](https://anglicanmainstream.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Richard-Rohr-by-Jane-Krammer-for-AM.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0rh32x4p02gAHZtEoBVg8FWYC_a_SWvlsRRi-M3j_5zYQ3mBS3tPfa1S4).
- <sup>25</sup> Bob DeWaay, "Enneagram: Pagan Mysticism Promoted as Christian Growth," accessed March 23, 2020, [https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue138.htm?fbclid=IwAR2ik755j4dBOXZ9cXdlj09Hj0XFfjmQ7eI0cp4jFCxZu03b1iwfKF\\_Fnw](https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue138.htm?fbclid=IwAR2ik755j4dBOXZ9cXdlj09Hj0XFfjmQ7eI0cp4jFCxZu03b1iwfKF_Fnw).
- <sup>26</sup> CatholicCorner, "Fr. Richard Rohr – Cosmic Christ?" *YouTube* video, 29:00. January 19, 2011. Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LYQQ05uFtA>; Montenegro, "Who Do Men Say That I Am? . . ." Richard Rohr, "The Universal Christ – Another Name for Everything;" *Center for Action and Contemplation*, accessed March 23, 2020. <https://cac.org/another-name-for-every-thing-the-universal-christ/>; Richard Rohr, "The Perennial Tradition," *Center for Action and Contemplation*, November 25, 2016. Accessed March 23, 2020. <https://cac.org/perennial-tradition-weekly-summary-2016-11-26/>; Richard Rohr, "The Christification of the Universe," *Center for Action and Contemplation*, November 6, 2016. Accessed March 23, 2020. <https://cac.org/the-christification-of-the-universe-2016-11-06/>; Richard Rohr, "One God, One Love," *Center for Action and Contemplation*, December 13, 2016. Accessed March 23, 2020. <https://cac.org/one-god-one-love-2016-12-13/>
- <sup>27</sup> Perennialism is an educational philosophy that is teacher-centered and states that education should only be focused around truths that have lasted for centuries. "Pantheism maintains that the divine is in all things and unifies all things, but ultimately transcends all things. Therefore, while the universe is a part or aspect of God (or the Goddess), it is not equivalent to God or the entirety of God's being." (James K. Walker, *The Concise Guide to Today's Religions and Spirituality*, Eugene; OR: 2007, p.248)
- <sup>28</sup> Mars Hill Tech, "Dr. A. J. Sherrill – Lenten Enneagram," March 5, 2019, Vimeo, 1:51:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23DOQCqvsXa&fbclid=IwAR2XL5v-su0q2SDNeBu29JZIK0ZR4w1V5Sqn2qNoi4ZcosGA5y2fwqal>; there are numerous Christian pastors and publications endorsing and teaching the Enneagram including four books from InterVarsity Press, a book with workbook by Chris Heuertz from Zondervan, and nine books by Beth McCord from Thomas Nelson (one book on each of the 9 "types").
- <sup>29</sup> These include Helen Palmer, Ginger Lapid-Bogda, Beatrice Chestnut, Don Riso, Russ Hudson, Dr. David Daniels (mentored Beatrice Chestnut and others, and worked with Helen Palmer), Dee and Pat Aspell, Michael Naylor, Thomas Condon, Kathleen Hurley, Sandra Maitri, Roxanne Howe-Murphy. I assessed these people as New Age (or likely New Age in the case of Dr. Daniels) based on their websites, interviews, and/or book descriptions.
- <sup>30</sup> Beth McCord's website, "Your Enneagram Coach" lists: McCord names Helen Palmer, Russ Hudson, David Daniels, Jessica Dibbs, and Katherine Favvre as instructors for online courses, see: <https://www.yourenneagramcoach.com/about>.
- <sup>31</sup> Richard Rohr in discussing his book *Immortal Diamond* states, "This book likens True Self to a diamond, buried deep within us, formed under the intense pressure of our lives, that must be searched for, uncovered, separated from all the debris of ego that surrounds it. In a sense True Self must, like Jesus, be resurrected, and that process is not resuscitation but transformation." Accessed March 23, 2020, [https://store.cac.org/products/immortal-diamond?\\_ga=2.91069267.871590903.1574714152-1171973742.1551898521](https://store.cac.org/products/immortal-diamond?_ga=2.91069267.871590903.1574714152-1171973742.1551898521).



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