

THE ENNEAGRAM - A WARNING

The word Enneagram comes from the Greek 'ennea' meaning nine and 'gramma' which means sign. The name refers to a diagram comprising a circle with nine points on its circumference, connected within the circle by a triangle and a twisted hexagon. This diagram has become known as the symbol for a system of personality typology consisting of nine standard character types. It is often falsely promoted as an ancient sacred tool, despite the fact that the character 'types' attached to the diagram were created and added during the twentieth century by two East Europeans who had been dabbling in the occult.

As reported in *The Catholic Herald* in September 2006, the Vatican has spoken specifically about the Enneagram. The document *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life - A Christian Reflection on the New Age*, published jointly by the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in February 2003, stated that the Enneagram was originally used for divination 'but has become known as a system of personality typology.' The document warns of new ways of practising Gnosticism and states: '*An example of this can be seen in the Enneagram....which when used as a means of spiritual growth produces an ambiguity in the doctrine and the life of the Christian faith*'.

In a book entitled *Catholics and the New Age* by American Jesuit Fr Mitch Pacwa, two chapters - some 30 pages - are devoted to an examination of, and a warning about, the Enneagram - especially its occultic roots. The Enneagram can immerse unsuspecting participants in self-centred self-analysis at the expense of Christ-centred devotion. It is claimed that the Enneagram gives a new understanding of one's self and one's relationship with others - all on the basis of feelings and emotions - whilst avoiding examination of conscience and any acknowledgement of sin or personal guilt. Even the recommendations for prayer in the Enneagram depend on first identifying one's 'type' number from twenty-seven permutations. The list of prayer suggestions includes: '*...centering prayer, zen, focus on feelings, connecting inner and outer world, unconscious feelings, mantra, guided imagery, dreamwork, yoga, rhythm of breathing, music and dance*.' To include various New Age practices among these recommendations is both dangerous and irresponsible.

There is no mention of the traditional Catholic definition of prayer: the act of 'raising up the mind and heart to God.' Suggesting the use of Jungian psychology and Eastern prayer techniques - about which the Church has issued specific warnings - is wrong. In December 1989 the Vatican issued a document giving the Church's position on such prayer techniques. It points out that *no method or technique can 'master' the love of God*. The document also warns against prayer techniques that are not inspired by the Gospel and which, in practice, tend to ignore Christ in favour of a mental void that has *no meaning* in Christianity. And yet, despite this warning, the Enneagram is still promoted at Catholic retreat centres and in Catholic parishes. These programmes focus attention on self rather than on Christ. They are inward-looking rather than outward-looking. They are consistent with New Age thinking. It is no coincidence that among the widely-promoted books on the Enneagram are titles by ex-Domican priest Matthew Fox and Fr Edward Schillebeeckx - both of whom publicly dissent from Church teaching.

Workshops offering the Enneagram are encountered in many parishes and retreat houses. One typical promotional leaflet claims that the programme is: '*a system of typology encompassing both psychological and spiritual dimensions*' and it goes on to state that it was: '*originally developed by the Sufi masters*' and '*is now being elaborated by the insight of Western psychology*'. The leaflet also states that the Enneagram sets out '*nine differing approaches to experiencing, thinking, feeling and behaving*' the main purpose of which is '*to discover one's type and to find one's way to greater authentic personal freedom*.' These claims are misleading.

Furthermore, it was claimed by the originators of the Enneagram that all human beings fall into one or other of the nine personality types. There are no exceptions. One critic comments on this claim as follows: *'As a psychotherapist, I find this utterly naïve. Each human person is a unique creation of God. To imply that God was so limited in His creativity that He could come up with only nine personality types is a travesty. The most insidious principle of the Enneagram is that it cuts God and His grace out of the process of human healing.....it presupposes that one's spiritual and emotional health depends on imitating another human being rather than on imitating Jesus Christ as the Church has taught consistently.....The Enneagram, in effect, denies original sin, sees no need for grace...and rejects the Cross (since we can avoid suffering by allowing the Enneagram to enlighten and heal us). This is dangerous New Age humanism which regards man as god and is designed to swell the ego to the exclusion of the true God.'* It should be avoided.

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