

The Enneagram in Spiritual Direction

by

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1.0 Introduction

This report examines the use of the Enneagram in spiritual direction. Particular attention is paid to:

- (1) How using the Enneagram to come to self-awareness can assist a spiritual director in his/her practice.
- (2) How spiritual directors can use the Enneagram to work with and assist directees on their journey
- (3) How to apply this knowledge in the direction process

In writing about the Enneagram Fr. Richard Rohr OSF states, "...the Enneagram is not primarily a tool of the mind but a tool of the soul. The goal and direction of the Enneagram is spiritual conversion."¹ This study is devoted to the application of the Enneagram as a 'tool for the soul'.

This report makes no effort to illuminate the reader on the terminology of the Enneagram. The recommended reading list in the appendix is a good place to find out more.

2.0 Methodology

Seven spiritual directors were interviewed during May and June 2012. Six of the interviews were face-to-face and one via telephone. All interviews were recorded and followed a list of questions that were designed to generate in-depth discussion on the topic. Verbatim comments have been used, with the interviewee's permission, to illustrate conclusions.

Five participants are female and two male. Two are ordained Anglican priests, three are Catholic sisters and two participants also work as counsellors. Most had been introduced to the Enneagram before becoming spiritual directors which means the majority have a knowledge base upwards of 20-years or more on the topic.

My sincere thanks to the seven spiritual directors who contributed their time and wisdom to this study.

¹ Rohr, Richard. *Enneagram II, Advancing Spiritual Discernment*. Harper Collins, Australia, 1995, P X

3.0 Key Findings

1. The Enneagram is used primarily as tool for coming to self-knowledge.
2. The Enneagram helps directors identify if a directee is struggling with her/his shadow, to work through this period, and to see that in spite of the difficulties there are good things to found in this seemingly dark space
3. while the Enneagram is very useful it is only one resource and should be held lightly by a spiritual director
4. Its use depends on where the directee is in her/his journey
5. Its appearance in a session tends to be initiated by the directee
6. The Enneagram can be used, and often is, without the directee being aware
7. Care must be taken not to use the Enneagram to box or label a directee
8. The Enneagram can indeed be a support on the path of transformation and thereby bring someone closer to God
9. It is important to point out that for all that it brings to the process of spiritual direction; the Enneagram is not a magic bullet.
10. Enneagram training opportunities in New Zealand are rare. This might be an issue that SGM and ACSD could jointly address.

4.0 What is the Enneagram?

“The Enneagram is a geometric figure that maps out nine fundamental personality types of human nature and their complex interrelationships. It is a development of modern psychology that has its roots in spiritual wisdom from many different traditions.”²



Courtesy of The Enneagram Institute
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The Enneagram describes nine distinct ways of viewing the world that are grouped into three sub-types or energy centres. The chart below groups the nine types into their energy centres and for each type gives two names that are commonly used in the literature.

The Heart Centre	The Head Centre	The Gut Centre
Type Two The Carer, The Helper,	Type Five The Thinker, The Investigator	Type Eight The Leader, The Challenger
Type Three The Achiever, The Performer	Type Six The Sceptic, The Loyalist	Type Nine The Peacemaker, The Mediator
Type Four The Romantic, The Individualist	Type Seven The Enthusiast, The Epicure	Type One The Reformer, The Perfectionist

As demonstrated in this study, it is primarily in negative behaviour, the Shadow – “those dormant and dark aspects of our personalities or unrealised potential that we keep out of our consciousness”³ that we discover our true Enneagram type.

² Riso, Don Richard & Hudson, Russ. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*. (Bantam: New York, 1999) P9.

³ SGM Module 5. *Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Direction*, p16

5.0 Why Spiritual Directors use the Enneagram

As illustrated by responses from people interviewed for this project, the Enneagram shows us:

1. How we can identify if someone is grappling with their shadow and compulsions
2. How we might accompany the directee at this time.

“The Enneagram reveals your strengths and heightens for you when you move into an unhealthy space and highlights how to journey into a more healthy space, gives framework for that.”

“When I’m hearing a repetitive pattern in their lives, a stuckness, I like to refer to one of the charts that I’ve got. As you listen you pick up a life compulsion and knowing what to do with that and what direction to go has been very helpful.”

“Just as I have found the Enneagram a wonderful tool and guide for my own spiritual journey and self-awareness, what the patterns are, where the stress points lead often at a subconscious level, I realised that this can be a great tool for others.”

“Because of the insight it gives into the way we function and in particular in spiritual direction, the insights into where resistance might come from or where people are on the cusp of growth, and you get insights into where people might be going. Also it’s very useful to identify the extent to which people are in touch with their interior life.”

“It helps me to see whether they are going in the direction of growing, of becoming more healthy or going in the direction of un-health.”

The Enneagram enables the directee to ‘name’ what is happening for them.

“In a way it’s almost a naming tool and gives people the words to describe what’s happening for them and the framework within which to describe it.”

“Sometimes directees have taken on their own symbols or terms that relate to their type. An 8 might say, ‘I feel so pressured I’ve become like a bull in a china shop’; a metaphor of how the compulsion is taking over. This is something we can share and even laugh about, and it’s an indication that their own self observer is noticing them getting into the unhealthy state.”

“The Enneagram is a most important tool for self-knowledge, not only to notice and name the deficits within one’s personality yet also to notice and name and celebrate the gifts.”

“It can feature a lot for me as a Director in that as a person is describing their spiritual experience or their journeying with God, little lights come on for me and I can see that a person is journeying in a particular way that connects with their personality. I find it affects their hermeneutic; when things are happening between themselves and God I can see their Enneagram number influencing the way they interpret their religious experience. It really gives me a way of journeying with them effectively.”

First and foremost, however, we study the Enneagram to come to self-knowledge. Participants in this project considered this as being perhaps more important for themselves than for their directees.

6.0 Self-knowledge and the Director

“Self-knowledge is the essence of spiritual growth. Without this earnest pursuit of deeper self-knowledge directors run the risk of injuring not only themselves but also those they are attempting to guide.”⁴

Knowledge of the Enneagram makes spiritual directors acutely aware of how their own personality type can influence the way they work.

“I’m very aware that as a 5 people get exasperated about what I’m thinking. I can get very caught up in their narratives and go with the flow. Those are two things I have to watch for.”

“I’m a 2 and one of things that I know about myself and people in the heart centre is that we are into action and moving and I can be quite quick sometimes. So one of the things is to wait and hold back and stay with the person where they are at and not move them on too quickly. The tendency of the 2 is to want to be helpful; not determine how the session went because I was helpful for that person.”

“I’m a 1 so avoiding my own tendency to become too responsible. Ultimately this is God’s work, it’s not just me and I don’t have to take responsibility for this. I can be quite strong about what I believe in but it is important not always to voice that too strongly, respecting where others are at but be gentle, not be too serious and use humour in a way that is suitable. Letting go, it doesn’t have to be me taking responsibility and sorting out this persons’ life for them.”

These are classic examples of Enneagram insights.

- The 5 (Thinker) is mindful of her tendency to be an observer and not a participant in the process
- The 2 (Carer) is acknowledging her impulse to rescue directees

⁴ SGM Module 5. *Psychological Aspects of Spiritual Direction*, p10

- The 1 (Perfectionist) speaks of her inclination to want to take responsibility for the directee's life.

These ego-driven compulsions may be “so deep in us that we don't know any other way to do it”⁵. Awareness of how these compulsions can subtly undermine their work as directors enables the participants in this project to be more present to the directee and more attentive to their role when giving direction.

7.0 Self-knowledge and the Directee

Helping directees come to self-knowledge is the prime reason why participants use the Enneagram.

“If I feel the person wants more self-understanding, more self-awareness, wants a greater grasp of where she needs to grow.”

“It's a real guide to a transformation process and it's a great support to real authentic love and compassion and it's based on truth about oneself and others. It's a cleared-eyed way of both accepting where I am or where others are in it and what the challenges are in it. Also it can be really supportive for someone knowing where to go to find balance, for example 2s knowing to go to the healthy side of the 4. So it gives these great directions which can help simplify things.”

“If they were having relational difficulties with themselves, with others, with God, I would very carefully tell them about the existence of the Enneagram, say how it had helped us personally and leave it at that.”

However, care must be taken when using the Enneagram as a tool for self-knowledge as we discover our type by the shadow side of our personality.

“Most of us don't like our un-health. Sometimes they say, ‘Oh I think I'm such and such a number but I think my boss is that number too and I don't like

⁵ Rohr, Richard. *Enneagram II, Advancing Spiritual Discernment*. Harper Collins, Australia, 1995, P 4.

what I see in my boss.' Or they don't like what they see in themselves. They don't say, 'I'm so thrilled I've got this gift!' So sometimes there is resistance or lack of ownership about it and that is why sometimes people don't land in the right space."

"They may become despondent as they recognise their unhealthy aspects more than their healthy ones. This is quite natural to begin with; I speak of my own movements between health and un-health; I say it is a moveable feast, and that I am still growing in my achievements around managing myself and my type."

"One of the ways you know they've hit the target with themselves is they say, 'Oh no, anything but that! I don't want to be that!' Because the way the Enneagram is presented to people it does identify your negative characteristic pretty quickly. If they don't react then I'm immediately suspicious they probably haven't got this right yet."

"It's affirming, but not always comfortable, in fact it can be very uncomfortable. Not many of us are delighted to find where we are. I guess it helps us to face ourselves, tell ourselves the truth, to be very honest, and until you reach that point you are not going very far at all."

"I had a 5 and she was in a dark place and she said I think I've slipped into the 4 and I actually quite like that dark place but it's not good for me to stay there."

8.0 The process of introducing the Enneagram to a directee

Participants in the study agreed that:

- the Enneagram should be held lightly by a spiritual director
- Its use depends on where the directee is in her/his journey
- Its appearance in a session tends to be initiated by the directee
- It can be used, and often is, without the directee being aware

Of the seven participants in the study one had made a blanket decision to offer it to every directee while another only used it if prompted by a directee. Of the remaining five some sought opportunities to introduce it to the directee while others took a more passive approach and only used it if they felt the directee was ready for it.

“Firstly I am very cautious about introducing the Enneagram to a directee and just put a toe in to see their reaction to a personality study because some of them are so afraid of being boxed that some would not even want to know.”

“It depends on peoples’ readiness or interest in following it up. I could put the question, ‘Would you like to know more?’ but if the person had no interest I wouldn’t push it. But at a later time the same person may come back later and ask about it.”

“Some are very open, some are longing to hear about something like that; others are just not ready for the Enneagram which tells you something about where they are on the Enneagram. You can try again in a years’ time.”

“Holding the Enneagram fairly lightly, not thinking it offers a definite description of the person’s personality. Keeping any ideas you have to yourself, while waiting for the truth to emerge is very important in case you’ve got it wrong.”

“A lot of people I see as directees already have experience of the Enneagram. For others I give them descriptions of it and leave it to them to make a choice about it because it takes a certain amount of ego strength before some people can take it. I avoid any form of pressure because when one is in the position of being a director or a counsellor, a person can try and do something to please.”

Participants related how they used the Enneagram while giving spiritual direction but without using its language or the directee realising it was being applied.

"I might be aware of a person's type, which I often am, and my knowledge and awareness of different types such as head, heart, gut might enable me to be more present to a person."

"I had a directee recently who talked about being safe and secure so it helps me to know how I may have to resource her in her own capacity to be safe and secure. So it's more a help to me rather than worrying about telling them too much about it."

"I suppose where it helps me is when I pick up people's energy of what they are on the Enneagram and from there I use it from my own personal perspective. I'll say to myself this person seems to be a 2, always out there helping others and neglecting her own needs. So when I listen and hear her story I keep that in mind and direct her in the way she needs to go."

"My knowledge of the Enneagram enhances me in working with people whether they know what space they're in or not. Helps me to greater understanding"

9.0 Misuse of the Enneagram in Spiritual Direction

All participants agreed that the Enneagram is open to misuse especially if used to 'box' people.

"Introducing it when it's not appropriate, labouring it, keep talking about it. Whilst I really value the Enneagram and think it's one of the most wonderful tools, it's also important not to box people. I think there are many other factors in a person's life that determines how they actually respond in life. There are many people who go into rescuing but they may not be a 2. There are many people who are indecisive but they are not 6s. So the misuse is when you over emphasise it or box them by saying this is how it is for a 6 or a 7 or whatever."

"It's important not to label people; you're a 9, easy going, nothing worries you. You can label people and start seeing them that way instead of being open."

“Don’t impose it on anybody, it’s only a tool, it’s not definitive. Yes, the risk is that if I’m wrong or the tool doesn’t fit, then I’ve got to notice it quickly. That’s the danger of these typing tools is that you’re at risk of imposing your answers on questions they’re not asking.”

“Sometimes it seems intrusive to initiate the Enneagram. I don’t want it to be seen as a circus-act or a trick-question or magical in some way.”

10.0 Where is God in all of this?

Is it Christian? Is it New Age? Can the Enneagram bring us closer to God? Questions such as these have long been asked of the Enneagram.

For me, Luke 6: 41-42 speaks directly to my Enneagram journey. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”⁶ For plank think compulsion. Until we acknowledge our own compulsion we lack the vision to assist others with their spiritual journey.

In *Weeds Among the Wheat* Fr. Thomas Green S.J. writes about the educative value of weeds. “Unless we can accept the weeds in the faith-spirit of St Paul and learn the lesson of our infirmity – these weeds *could* choke the wheat and destroy the harvest. It is not enough to let them survive; they must survive for a purpose, serve a good end. This means we must see them with the eyes of discerning love, of discernment.”⁷

Weeds, plank, compulsion; words that in the context of the spiritual journey have been understood to lead us away from God and in that sense could be understood to represent sin. It is here that we discover the true wisdom of the Enneagram.

- The Enneagram ‘names’ this sin/gift

⁶ Luke 6: 41-42 New International Version

⁷ Green, Thomas H. *Weeds Among the Wheat*, (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, 1984, P146

- Our sin and our gift are different sides of the same coin
- It shows how that gift evolves into the dark shadow of our personality without our knowing
- We learn that this is an unavoidable feature of the first stage of life
- It provides a framework for us to turn our sin into something that will 'serve a good end'

And like Paul we can claim, "For it is when I am weak that I am strong." (2 Cor 12:9-10)

So, can the Enneagram bring a directee closer to God? The spiritual directors who participated in this study tended to think so.

"One of my philosophies around spiritual direction is about helping, enabling people to become the person God calls them to be, find new ways of being on the journey, make people the way God wants them to be, transformation, growth, develop; it's a fantastic tool."

"For example, an 8 discovering that they can let God be in control, that God doesn't need them to be in control even though he might use them, and then on to discovering the fact that being in control may in fact be a delusion."

"I believe it is probably the single best tool for a spiritual seeker to begin the becoming of a real Christ-like person. We are all called to be Christ-like and this tool is a treasure in my 'becoming' box."

"The most useful tool for me has been relating the Enneagram to Paul's comments in Galatians on the works of human nature and the fruit of the spirit. The works of human nature is when we are doing what we think will be best for us, not knowing that will stuff it up. The Fruit of the Spirit is when we let God take charge and this seems like the dumbest thing to do but has the best outcome."

"For example, 9s love nature and nature is really important for me to get in touch with God. For 3s their spirituality is really about seeing that their success

is all about getting in touch with their own virtue and humility. For 6s who have a great need for security and feeling of belonging and getting in touch with that security through meditation.”

“The greatest thing is the way it enabled me to be myself in my relation to God.”

“We discover who we truly are when we look into God’s eyes and see ourselves reflected there. To me the Enneagram is able to add some flesh to that. So who am I truly? Truly I am the person who lives into those positive characteristics. If I’m seeing that in myself I’m being more who I truly am.”

“David Benner uses the Enneagram and he gives it a very good press and says it is the only personality study that talks about sin. He likes the honesty of the thing. It’s called standing naked before God.”

“Knowing the root sin, the temptation, and sub-types, and the things we avoid, makes this quite a help to check and adjust ourselves in many situations, most especially within our relationship with God. Self-policing I call that.”

“To help people to recognise that we are all different aspects of God, and for people to reclaim their goodness or God-ness.”

11.0 Why study the Enneagram?

“Spiritual direction has always aimed ultimately at fostering union with God”.⁸ In my time on the SGM course and as a result of interviewing the participants in this study, I have concluded that if used appropriately, the Enneagram can help spiritual directors to:

- Enhance the relationships between director and directee (SGM module 2)
- Facilitate discernment (SGM module 3)
- Discover different prayer styles (SGM module 4)

⁸ Barry, William A & Connolly, William J. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. (Harper Collins, New York, 2009, p9.

- Better understand the psychological aspects of spiritual direction (SGM module 5)
- Explore models and features of spiritual growth (SGM module 6)
- Identify transference (SGM workshop 3)
- Notice resistance (SGM workshop 4).

Another reason why spiritual directors need to know and use the Enneagram is because more and more people are learning about it. However, participants in the survey concurred that finding training opportunities in New Zealand can be difficult. This might be an issue that SGM and ACSO could jointly address.

12.0 What the Enneagram isn't

In closing, it is important to point out that for all that it brings to the process of spiritual direction; the Enneagram is not a magic bullet.

"I don't see the Enneagram as the be-all-and-end-all but it has its place in a wider context. I think it's an important tool, no doubt about that, but once you've got somebody's type that's only a tiny step on the way."

13.0 Reading List and Training Opportunities

The seven participants were asked to name their preferred Enneagram books and especially the titles they most recommend. Here is their list.

Enneagram and Spirituality

- Using the Enneagram in Prayer: A Contemplative Guide by Suzanne Zuercher, Notre Dame, Ind. Ave Maria Press, 2008
- Enneagram Companions: Growing in Relationships and Spiritual Direction by Suzanne Zuercher, Notre Dame, Ind. Ave Maria Press, 1993
- Enneagram Spirituality: From Compulsion to Contemplation by Suzanne Zuercher, Notre Dame, Ind. Ave Maria Press, 1992
- Parables and the Enneagram by Clarence Thomson, New York, Crossroad Pub. Co, 1996
- Merton: An Enneagram Profile by Suzanne Zuercher, Notre Dame, Ind. Ave Maria Press, 1996
- Enneagram and Spiritual Direction by James Empereur, New York : Continuum, 1997.
- The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective by Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, New York: Crossroad Pub., 2001.
- Enneagram II - Advancing Spiritual Discernment by Richard Rohr, New York: Crossroad Pub., 2001.

- The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide for Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types by Richard Don Riso and Russ Hudson, New York : Bantam Books, 1999.

General books on the Enneagram

- The Enneagram Made Easy by Renee Baron and Elizabeth Wagele, Harper San Francisco, 1994
- Enneagram Transformations by Don Richard Riso, Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1993
- The Essential Enneagram by David Daniels & Virginia Price, Harper San Francisco, 2000.
- The Enneagram: Understanding Yourself and Others in Your Life by Helen Palmer, Harper San Francisco, 1991.
- The Enneagram in Love and Work: by Helen Palmer, Harper San Francisco, 1991

Training Courses

All participants agreed that training opportunities are difficult to find in New Zealand. Each year the Mercy Spirituality Centre in Epsom runs a weekend course that uses live panellists for each type. This course is helpful for individuals wishing to discover and learn about the Enneagram for their own growth.

An Enneagram Interest Group also meets at the Mercy Centre twice a year and welcomes spiritual directors who want to explore beyond the basics.

Unfortunately, Enneagram training opportunities in New Zealand are rare and this might be an issue that SGM and ACSD could jointly address.

A 'certificated' training opportunity is offered annually by 'Enneagram Worldwide' (Helen Palmer & David Daniels) in Melbourne.

However, as one participant said, the very best training is watching and listening to directees as they come to terms with their type.

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