

## **The Not-So-Sacred Enneagram, Book Review of "The Sacred Enneagram"** by Christopher L. Heuertz

[Kenneth Berding](#) — November 15, 2018

Several of my college students in recent days have asked for my opinion about the Enneagram of Personality. It turns out that while I've had my nose stuck in my Greek New Testament, the Enneagram has become all the rage. So I decided to hunker down and educate myself about the Enneagram. My initial take is that some people use the Enneagram merely as a personality test to help them become aware of their character traits and negative propensities. If that's all there is to it, then there is little about which to complain. But my initial foray into all-things-Enneagram suggests that there often is a spiritual side to this diagram-of-types. That spiritual aspect ranges, on the one hand, from disturbingly false religious ideas, to more mundane personality analysis, on the other. But even the most mundane appearances of the Enneagram still often include a claim that there is "spiritual" insight to be gained through its use, so Christians behoove themselves to critically evaluate whether the tool they are utilizing is biblically-rooted and God-honoring—or not.

Since the students who initially asked my opinion about the Enneagram are themselves evangelical Christians (rather than Roman Catholics, among whom the purportedly spiritual aspects of the Enneagram have especially been promoted), I decided to start my analysis by reading a professedly Christian book published by a historically evangelical Christian publisher. Last year, Christopher L. Heuertz came out with a book entitled: [The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth](#) (Zondervan, 2017). Let me state my main conclusion at the outset so you can know where this rather long review is headed: Mr. Heuertz (and Zondervan along with him) has been distributing a book that is deeply disturbing because of the quantity and seriousness of the false doctrine appearing in it. If you think I'm exaggerating, let me encourage you to start by viewing Mr. Heuertz's [three minute video talk](#) promoting his book and then read my review below. Let me offer four caveats before I launch into a review of the book itself:

**Caveat 1:** I will proceed on the assumption that you know what the Enneagram is. If you don't, read [this secular introduction](#).

**Caveat 2:** I am aware that some Christians have only ever encountered and interacted with the Enneagram as a personality profile (perhaps in their place of work). This means that such Christians may not have been influenced by the aberrant religious beliefs that will be described below. But they also may have, so if you have any connection to the Enneagram, it's worth taking a bit of time to do some self-examination.

**Caveat 3:** I don't claim to have read enough to know whether there are any positive uses of the Enneagram for Christians that have not been so tainted with mystical

non-Christian spiritual notions to make it altogether unusable. I have not read enough yet to be able to weigh in on the general question. What follows is merely a review of one particular book that apparently is having an impact in evangelical Christian circles. Concerning such impact, Mr. Heuertz himself claims on p. 51: "evangelical seminaries and churches everywhere are incorporating the Enneagram into their curriculum." If this teaching on the Enneagram is the same version that Mr. Heuertz is propagating, let us hope that this is an exaggeration.

**Caveat 4:** This post is longer than a normal blog post. What makes it long are the many quotations from the book. I anticipate some people questioning whether I have been fair in my analysis. So rather than simply telling you what I think is wrong with the book, I thought that you might like to see the problems for yourself. This entails a longer review than normal. What follows is a list of some of my concerns about the book, organized under the categories of: sacredness, original virtue, sin, salvation, sanctification, syncretism and a few odds and ends.

### **Is the Enneagram Sacred?**

We get no further than the book title (The Sacred Enneagram) before we are confronted with the crucial question of how we should view the Enneagram in general. The use of the adjective "sacred" guides readers into viewing the Enneagram as something holy and spiritual. In fact, Mr. Heuertz uses the adjectives "sacred" (e.g., 19, 26, 29, 32, 49, 58, 228) and "holy" (e.g., 35-37, 71, 77) throughout the book. One of his section titles is simply: "The Enneagram as a Sacred Map" (29). Disturbingly, moving even beyond his use of terms of reverence such as "sacred" or "holy," he often describes the Enneagram as doing things—as though it is alive and powerful. He also deems it a revealer of truth. Such comments are so frequent that it becomes difficult to view these remarks as mere hyperbole. Here are some examples of Heuertz portraying the Enneagram as holy, spiritual and powerfully alive:

"...Enneagram types aren't just buckets for unique sets of idiosyncrasies but rather offer clues to the essence of each person's particular purpose." (30)

"But the Enneagram is much more than a mere symbol." (42)

"It's no overstatement to suggest that we hardly understand what we are working with, so we would do well to take a learning stance of humility." (49)

"This begins with recognizing that the Enneagram can't be reduced to a personality test and that we have much more to learn. As Russ Hudson frequently emphasizes, 'Type isn't a 'type' of person, but a path to God.'" (49)

“As a sacred map to our soul, the Enneagram is a blueprint for developing character that each of us carries throughout our life, but one that we don’t open until we discover our type.” (49)

“But if it’s weirding you out a bit, that’s okay; the Enneagram might not be for you, or this might not be the right time in your life to dig into it. In my experience, it seems like it always shows up right on time.” (51)

“Coming to terms with our type is a rite of passage, a sacred experience that should be owned by each of us when we are ready for it.” (58)

“...without understanding the ‘why’ behind type, we sometimes mistake personality or temperament for essence...” (58)

“So it’s worse than a ‘party foul’ to type someone; it is an intrusion or an overreach. It’s also an indication that someone doesn’t understand the power and potential of the Enneagram.” (60)

Section Title: “How the Enneagram Found Me.” (81) On the same page: “It was during the summer of 2000, in the slums of Cambodia, that the Enneagram first found me.” (81)

“But the Enneagram is relentless, and once it finds you, it doesn’t let go—truth and light are like that.”

“The Enneagram, through its unabashed truth-telling, invites us to return to our essential nature, the home for our souls.” (102-103)

“The Enneagram won’t let us sidestep...The Enneagram forces us to wake up...” (167)

“I think I now understand why the Enneagram has been an oral tradition for thousands of years. To try to limit its dynamic mystery and forceful beauty within the confines of the written page is quite a daunting task.” (241)

### **Original Virtue**

We were born virtuous, so we are told in this book, but then developed a tragic flaw, often through disappointments or hurts from our parents or caretakers. Our tragic flaw is the place where we park our destructive addictions. The aim of the Enneagram, though, is to guide us into a rediscovery of our true self. Christian readers, however, should take note that this is not what the Bible teaches about original sin. We are not born virtuous. We inherit the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12-21) and are hopelessly in need of a Savior from the day we are born. Here are a few of Mr. Heuert’s comments about our original virtuous state and the true self that we are supposed to re-discover through the Enneagram:

“More than anything I’ve encountered, the Enneagram helps us do just that. It exposes the lies we tell ourselves about our identities.... It illuminates what’s good and true and beautiful about each of us.” (16)

The Enneagram’s goal is to “reveal our soul’s essence in its purest form.” (31)

“...it’s important to validate a person’s sense of what may have caused their own disconnect from their original Virtue.” (53)

“If you believe that in the earliest days of infancy we are as close to perfect as we’ll ever be in our lives—the most unencumbered from our tragic flaw and the most uncontaminated by its consequences—then the Holy Ideas and Virtues of the Enneagram types are the two fundamental aspects of our soul’s essence that reveal in us the raw material of our True Self.” (72)

Mr. Heuertz appears to read the Genesis narrative—where humans are created in the image of God and subsequently fall into sin—as symbolic of each individual’s birth into innocence, that is, the Genesis narrative is representative of “our best and purest sense of self”...“before sin gummed things up.” (72)

## **Sin**

Honestly, Mr. Heuertz’s view of sin is probably the aspect of this book I had the hardest time understanding. Nowhere in the book does he espouse the idea that we have offended the honor of a holy God and that we need Jesus to bear our sin through his death on the cross. In most instances, it looks like this author views “sin” merely as addictive tendencies or destructive patterns. I will include a few quotes from the book that may help you feel your way toward what he might or might not be saying about sin. In the final and longest quotation (where he writes about Naranjo), I think Mr. Heuertz is telling us that we shouldn’t think of sin as wrongness, but rather as dysfunction.

“This is how we get ourselves lost.” (18) How? “Overidentifying with our success or failure, allowing the fragments of our identity to lay claim to the whole, and falling into the addictive loop of our mental and emotional preoccupations keep us stuck.”

“...our addictive tendencies to defend our own illusions, enabling our ego to maintain its control over our sensibilities and emotional states.” (27)

“...ensuring we stay stuck in our addictive tendencies to remain tethered to our False Self.” (27)

“Our shadow—and we all have one—is the part of our ego we are unable to consciously recognize. Though it is neither good nor bad, it is where we unconsciously ‘park’ some of the worst of ourselves—destructive patterns, addictions, or other seemingly unrepresentable parts.” (52)

“Clearly too much of anything often leads to destructive patterns or addictions, where sin can be found. Certainly our Passions can distort into sin. This is especially true when the consequences of our addictive behaviors catch up to us.

I imagine this is what the nineteenth-century American philosopher Elbert Hubbard was suggesting when he wrote, ‘We are punished by our sins not for them.’

In one of my favorite books on the Enneagram, *The Enneagram of Society: Healing the Soul to Heal the World*, Claudio Naranjo does an excellent job explaining the actual sense of the Enneagram’s Passions. Naranjo translates Augustine’s notion of sin as it relates to ignorantia (ignorance) and difficultas (difficulties, distresses, embarrassments) as ‘a disorder of awareness and an interference with action.’

...Disordered awareness and action are exactly what block the fruit of our Holy Idea and Virtue from being realized, keeping us from our True Self and stuck in sin.

Naranjo goes on to suggest that it may be appropriate to use a sense of pathology, essentially cause and effect, to bring clarity and to ‘rescue the original sense of the word sin that had almost been forgotten after the contamination of the notion of wrongness as a dysfunction with that of wrongness as evil.’”

## **Salvation**

I have included the following quotations under the label of “salvation” since salvific language gets liberally applied to the Enneagram throughout the book (journey to God, coming home, personal or self-liberation, a sacred map, purpose for being, the real substance we aim for...). Since getting salvation is of such consequence to any biblical Christian interpreter, I have more quotes in this section than anywhere else.

Title of Chapter 1: *The Question of Identity: Exploring Who We Are, How We Got Lost, and How We Might Find Our Way Back Home to Our True Identity.* (15)

“So how have we gotten so far off track? How do we heal ourselves from the false identities we’ve reinforced? Ultimately, how do we find our way home to the God of love and our true identity? This is where the Enneagram comes in. It reveals our path for recovering our true identity and helps us navigate the journey home to God.” (23)

“The contemporary Enneagram of Personality illustrates the nine ways we get lost, but also the nine ways we can come home to our True Self.” (25)

“When we can find the courage to be honest with ourselves, we’re ready for the Enneagram, for the Enneagram exposes the illusions that have defined our sense of self. In this way, the Enneagram may be the most effective tool for personal liberation.” (26)

“Ultimately, though, for those willing to persevere, the Enneagram offers a sacred map for our souls; a map that, when understood, leads us home to our true identity and to God.” (26)

“As the most devout believers of any faith tradition mature, they find themselves quietly and undramatically allowing the fruit of their lives to speak for itself more than relying on conversionist tactics. That’s truly the fruit of real conversion, when our lives (not our words) validate authentic transformation.” (30)

“Taking off that mask, trying to get behind the mask, is the work of the spiritual journey.” (31)

“We wake up when we stop fueling our own self-preoccupation and allow self-realization to serve as an invitation to deep union with ourselves and God...” (32)

“The Enneagram is not a tool for self-absorption but instead a map for self-liberation.” (32)

“When the delusions of their ego are confronted by their True Self, they rest in the gift of their purpose for being.” (37) My comment: Shouldn’t he have written: When their sin is confronted by the gospel of Jesus Christ, they must repent and believe in Jesus Christ to receive forgiveness of sin?

“By digging deeper into the why behind each type we start to unravel the mystery of our True Self and essential nature. This is the real substance we aim for.” (39)

“...if you believe in the doctrine of original sin, then the Enneagram exposes the shape of your tragic flaw—the aspect of you that is most vulnerable to sin—as it is forced from your soul through the pressure of guilt, shame, stress, anxiety, fear, frustration, or anger.

This isn’t to suggest that the Enneagram only highlights the harmful ways we act out, but it does show us a pattern in the shape of the unique loop of our type that keeps us stuck. This loop has always been with us, the circular pull to reconnect with our original goodness that gets knocked off course by our original sin. This self-perpetuating loop of enduring our disconnect from the essence of our True Self can lead to addictions, and of course in addiction the environment for sin exists.” (71)

“At the root of nearly every decision we make in life is the desire to find our way home, back to our essential nature, our True Self, and back to God.” (73)

“Essentially, the Enneagram teaches us how to be more human. It is one of the most profound tools for personal and spiritual transformation. And to make the most of its offerings, we are invited to move beyond identifying our type toward putting this knowledge to work—to form a new identity, or perhaps more accurately, to reclaim our original identity. The Enneagram helps us find our unique path to spiritual growth, and this path is ultimately how we find our way home.” (165-166)

## **Sanctification**

How can you overcome your destructive patterns and addictions, according to Mr. Heuertz? His answer throughout the book is that transformation comes via self-knowledge acquired through the Enneagram and by facing our personal destructive patterns through the disciplines of solitude, silence, and stillness. See his quotations below:

“From personal experience, I can tell you with confidence that the Enneagram has been one of the most important aids in my spiritual formation.... Its role in bringing about a transformed life bears out its holy validity.” (50)

“Moving beyond a caricature of personality traits to understand the essence behind type unearths the true offering of the Enneagram: access to incredible transformation.” (60)

“Moving beyond the mere discovery of our type’s common traits into a deeper exploration that involves learning to discern with our type, facing the temptations and fears of our type, and ultimately praying through our type leads to real inner freedom. And that’s when our true identity can be unleashed.” (84)

Chapters 7-9 emphasize solitude, silence, and stillness as the means by which we can find “the way home.” Here’s one representative comment (in this case for type fours):

“Ultimately, Fours must move from desiring to be known (by themselves and others) to resting in the gift of their composed, self-actualized unshakable True Self.” (215)

## **Syncretism**

In his discussion of the meaning of the Enneagram symbol/diagram, Mr. Heuertz highlights his desire to be as inclusive as possible, and thereby mixes non-Christian religious ideas in with his purported Christian beliefs (syncretism). “The figure itself contains significant symbolism.

First, the circle denotes eternity, unity, wholeness, and the inclusivity of all things—the Law of One. Without a beginning or end, the circle illustrates the everlasting essence of love—think of a wedding ring, for example. And while the Enneagram is used and studied across religions, Christians may find in its imagery an expression of the unending love of God. This notion of oneness contains all that is and was and will be.

Second, the equilateral triangle within the Enneagram’s circle illustrates what is known as the Law of Three—the three forces that guide everything in motion: active, passive, and neutral. The tombs in which ancient Egyptians laid to rest the remains of their royalty (thought to be deities) were built as pyramids, usually in the shape of four triangles resting against each other to form a single point at the top... Early Christians used the triangle as a symbol of the Trinity to help explain the three consubstantial persons of the divine nature of God....

Third, the irregular, crisscrossed six-pointed hexagram within the Enneagram's circle is what is used to teach the Law of Seven. The Law of Seven is thought to explain the spectrums of things like light (refracted through the seven colors of a rainbow), sound (heard through the seven fundamental tones of an octave), sequence (the seven days of a week forming the basic interval to measure time), and energy (the seven chakras of the body's energy centers that yoga students learn)." (40-42)

Mr. Heuertz's syncretism is apparent in his section entitled The Ancient Origins of the Enneagram. (42) He writes: "Versions of the Enneagram have been around for thousands of years, hidden away in wisdom schools and passed along orally within the mystic traditions of the world's religions." (42-43) He admits that the origins of the Enneagram are contested, but he personally accepts the basic notion that its origins are diverse and ancient (241). He suggests connections with ancient Babylon, ancient Egypt, prehistoric Korea, folk Buddhism, Homer's Odyssey, Pythagoras, the Jewish philosopher Philo, the Kabbalah, the desert monk Evagrius Ponticus, and for him most plausible of all "Sufi [mystical Islamic] communities spread throughout Central Asia, from Iraq to Afghanistan." (42-44) Such connections, though, do not engender caution for Mr. Heuertz, rather, he seems to revel in his connection to such questionable sources.

In his section on the modern founders of the Enneagram (George Gurdjieff, Oscar Ichazo, and Claudio Naranjo), the author seems intent on connecting with their religious pluralism: Gurdjieff:

"access to several religious traditions" (44)

"committed to the quest for hidden knowledge" (45)

The Enneagram, for Gurdjieff, "could be used as an overlay to explain any evolved system, be it religion, science, or astrology." Gurdjieff is quoted to have said: "Everything can be included and read in the Enneagram." (45)

Gurdjieff was "a collector of mystical dances" (45)

"utilizing the Enneagram to describe one's essential nature as opposed to one's personality" (46)

Ichazo:

"attributed his discovery of the Enneagram to his world travels, which may have included exposure to the Sarmoung Brotherhood (the same group of esoteric Sufis thought to have taught Gurdjieff the Enneagram), and to a seven-day vision in which he claims an angel visited him with the teaching of the Enneagram." (47)

Naranjo:

“gathered his original Seekers After Truth group (named in honor of Gurdjieff’s collective of wisdom seekers) under the condition of secrecy.... That first little group...included Sandra Maitri, who since has published essential works on the spiritual dimensions of the Enneagram.” (47)

Mr. Heuertz anticipates that he will receive pushback about the Enneagram’s origins, and consequently writes: “Now I would be remiss not to mention that some individuals have concerns about the contested origins of the Enneagram, especially when viewed from a Christian perspective. I’m frequently asked if the Enneagram is a New Age teaching or has roots in the occult. Others want to know where the Enneagram shows up in the Bible. I can understand the apprehension; I myself wasn’t too sure about the Enneagram when I first learned about it.” (49-50)

In the following two paragraphs, Mr. Heuertz simply dismisses such concerns as “trivial” and “old hang-ups,” along the lines of anxieties people in his fundamentalist background expressed about dancing, tattoos, secular music and watching certain TV programs. (50)

What is the locus of truth? Is it the God revealed in Scripture, or in an amorphous notion of divine love that appears in various religions and philosophies? The author writes: “In regard to the Enneagram, you may have some questions yourself. I’ve found it helpful to affirm that as the origin of truth itself, Divine Love is in all truth no matter where it may be found.” (50)

What about the heart? Where do you go to get information about it? (...not the Bible). “Cynthia Bourgeault, in her recent book *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, helps shed light on all this. In her chapter titled “The Way of the Heart” she helps us see that the “heart” as it relates to spirituality is something much more than an Enneagram Intelligence Center or the role of feelings and emotions. She writes, ‘In the great wisdom traditions of the West (Christian, Jewish, Islamic), the heart is first and foremost an organ of spiritual perception.’ This is what the Harmon Triads are trying to express.” (148)

By the way, what is Non-dualism or Non-duality, per Bourgeault’s book title above? It is defined in Heuertz’s glossary as “The nonjudging awareness of the intrinsic oneness of all truth, resisting the reductionism that highlights the parts of a whole. An inner ability to reject classification, categorization, and compartmentalization; the conscious capacity to allow competing conclusions to coexist.” (247) This is definitional syncretism.

Concerning a “weekly public contemplative prayer sit” that Mr. Heuertz and his wife host on Wednesdays at 4:00 p.m. every week (163), he comments: “Frequently you will find a very traditional Catholic priest sitting across from an Episcopal bishop, or perhaps it’s a conservative preacher from the Southern Baptist suburban megachurch seated beside a progressive theologian from the nearby Jesuit university.

Those who normally would be divided by doctrine and belief come together in unity. Through their words they would find plenty about which to disagree, but silence brings them into a new kind of communion, forming a new kind of community.” (164) Mr. Heuertz favorably quotes from Eckhart Tolle (169), along with a host of others who do not believe that the Bible is the very Word of God, that Jesus Christ is God incarnate or that salvation is only through faith in Christ.

## **Odds and Ends**

### **Jesus Christ:**

Ironically, Mr. Heuertz’s views about Jesus end up among my odds and ends since there is little engagement in this book with the person and work of Jesus Christ. I have little idea about what he personally believes about Jesus in general, but in this book Jesus is usually one who teaches or illustrates the truth claims he is making about the Enneagram. Here is one example: “Now that we’ve come this far in learning to recognize our self beyond these lies and programs, how does our Enneagram path inform the way we nurture our spirituality? We can look to Jesus, who had to face these same lies and programs in his own way to reveal to us our original righteousness and True Self.” (186)

### **Atonement:**

This author appears to want to open up readers to the possibility that the traditional understanding that Jesus died in the place of sinners to appease the wrath of God is not quite how we should view it. He writes, “Today and throughout history, Christians have used the term passion to describe the suffering of Christ. But if Christ was sinless, then there wasn’t any sin in his suffering—unless the connection to the passion of Christ is in relationship to carrying the suffering of the sin of humanity. Even in this reach for meaning we see many prominent theologians now reconsidering atonement theories.” (77)

### **Biblical Interpretation:**

There’s no space for details here, but in the handful of times that Mr. Heuertz mentions or quotes from the Bible (36 55-56, 72, 98-99, 186-187)—and, truly, he rarely uses the Bible—he never once apprehends, in my opinion, the author’s intended meaning of the passages he mentions. Rather, like Philo of old who interpreted the Bible through Greek philosophy, or Bultmann, who read it through the grid of existentialism, Mr. Heuertz has overlaid the biblical text with his own interpretive grid, the grid of Enneagramic mysticism. Accordingly, he reads the Bible symbolically and allegorically.

## **Mystical Guidance:**

This book portrays the Enneagram as a mystical guide through which we can hear God. Here are three examples: “But God is here now, closer than our very breath, and can be found in our Intelligence Centers—the Enneagram’s way of helping us recognize our primary mode of perceiving the world through either our head, heart, or body. Each of the Intelligence Centers offers us a different way of experiencing the loving presence and voice of God.” (87-88) Again: “And so these three core centers connect us to the Divine presence within us that is always guiding and leading through intuition, impulse, and insight.” (91) One more: “These particular triadic groupings of Enneagram types get us beyond the surface of our type into deeper and more thrilling realms of how the Enneagram illuminates our unique path to spiritual growth.” (142)

## **God:**

There are hints here and there in this book that Mr. Huertz considers love to be the essence of God. The other attributes of God, such as holiness, find no place in this book. Here are a few comments that suggest something of his understanding of the nature of God: “Some of us think God is speaking outside of us, and so we’re always looking for signs or symbols of Divine movement in the world and fail to recognize that we don’t need to look outside ourselves to hear from the voice of Love who resides within.” (87) Again: “When we are centered, rooted in God’s embrace, and present to the God whose name is Love, we realize that we are heard and we can learn to hear.” (88) One more: “Fundamentally, love is at the heart of our Christian faith tradition. God is love, and in consenting to silence, we allow Love to wash over us, inviting us into a ‘new we,’ a new kind of community that affirms the divine imprint within all humanity and contributes to building the kind of world we all want to live in.” (164)

## **Summary**

Christopher Heuertz is promoting many false doctrines in his book *The Sacred Enneagram*. I write this with great grief and deep sorrow. *The Sacred Enneagram* is full of incorrect and misleading religious assertions. His teaching does not match what the Bible communicates regarding sin, salvation, sanctification, and probably also other core doctrines such as the nature of God, the person of Jesus Christ, and the atonement. He portrays the Enneagram as sacred, powerful, searching, alive. He mixes false religious ideas together with Christianity, and seems unconcerned about the Enneagram’s syncretistic origins.

So what should Christians do in general about the Enneagram? This post isn’t intended to answer this question. It is exclusively a book review of one particular book: Christopher Heuertz’s, *The Sacred Enneagram*. I hope that Christians henceforth will be careful of Mr. Heuertz’s teachings.

As I mentioned above, I'm relatively new to the discussion, and so haven't yet been able to determine whether there are any positive uses for the Enneagram (somehow untethered from its mystical and religious overtones) or whether we should avoid the Enneagram altogether.

I can say that if a book written by a professing Christian and published by an evangelical publisher can go this far astray, then, at the very least, we need to proceed with caution.

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