

Authors provide readable introduction to Enneagrams

Book explains spiritual process

Discovering the Enneagram: An Ancient Tool for a New Spiritual Journey, by Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, translated by Peter Heinegg, Crossroad Publishing Co. (New York, N.Y., 1990); 243 pages; \$17.95.

By David and Julianne Palma
Guest contributors

The word Enneagram — from Greek *ennea* (nine) and *gramma* (point, letter) — describes an ancient tradition of spiritual guidance. Its nine points identify "models for why certain men and women never find God, but always run up against themselves and their inner barriers..." (p.7)

Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert's book is an excellent introduction to this complex and fascinating route to self-awareness. For readers already familiar with the Enneagram, Rohr and Ebert clearly elaborate the strengths and weaknesses of the nine types in a more spiritual way than other authors, who tend to be more psychological in their approaches.

For aficionados of self-study, the Enneagram might seem too undefined. Unlike the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, it does not allow you to determine your type by answering a series of questions and looking up the resulting letters or numbers on a chart. As this book's subtitle suggests, the Enneagram is a process. "It confronts

us with compulsions and laws under which we live — usually without being aware of it — and it aims to invite us to go beyond them, to take steps into the domain of freedom." (p.4).

Rohr uses that unfashionable concept — sin — to identify "the dark side of our gifts" (p.15), which interferes in our relationships with God and with others. He adds deceit and fear to the traditional list of seven deadly sins. According to Rohr, the absence of these two from the original seven is very revealing of the denial present in our Western culture.

These nine sins are the individual compulsions of each point, but in the total circle, Rohr reveals Christ's face. In a later section of the book, he identifies Scripture events in which Jesus exhibited behavior showing each of the nine types. Indeed, he constantly reiterates that it is our very giftedness by God which is the opposite face of our sin.

Despite the emphasis on sin, there is no room here for blaming. The reader is not led to self-reproach, nor is the way open for accusing others for their behavior. Rohr and Ebert's approach is much more balanced than some previous studies emphasizing the neurotic extremes. They choose the word "unredeemed" for the individual who is caught in his or her compulsive behavior. This diction clearly allows (or invites) growth and "redemption."

This densely written book is difficult to adequately summarize, but this (temporarily redeemed) *five* reviewer wants to share the wealth of information available here. My *four* partner

will no doubt wish to stress the "special and unique" beauty of the book's presentation.

In the Introduction, Ebert characterizes the work as a write-up of "Richard Rohr's unrehearsed workshop," which Ebert attended in 1988, plus some "previously published literature on the subject." (p.xi) Rohr claims that "the nine energies and styles are best picked up through human voices and encounters than through the written word. Even this book is ... merely a complement to an Enneagram workshop or a set of tapes." (p.12)

Part I, "The Sleeping Giant," is the best presentation of the Enneagram's history — albeit somewhat conjectural — that we have yet encountered. The synopsis of its use in spiritual direction is also very clear and informative. The reader is cautioned not to skip over this theoretical base in a rush to "find out my number."

Each number is presented in detail in Part II. After an overview of the type, Rohr presents its specific dilemma. Again, the choice of this word reveals the author's emphasis on the dynamic tension between the gift and sin in each. These sides are illustrated with many anecdotal, real-world situations, helping to clarify the multiple aspects of each type.

Symbols of each are suggested as well as examples from literature, history and the Bible. Invitations and suggestions which can lead to conversion and redemption are also offered here. This last discussion is capped by a brief biography of a saint — ranging from Francis Assisi to Archbishop Os-

car Romero — whose life models the conversion journey for his or her type.

The final part is the most helpful to the reader who is already familiar with the Enneagram since it examines many of the shadings of behavior and identifies some practical applications of this type of self-awareness in the areas of prayer, Scripture and interpersonal relationships.

We'd like to note that in our marriage, and in those of friends, the Enneagram has proved very enriching and rewarding. It opens up communication and understanding on a very deep level. By reading about all the points on the circle, one comes to appreciate the gifts of each.

The primary relationship with which Rohr is concerned, however, is the one with God. The comfort that one derives from the process comes in the realization that "God has known all this all along" (p.14) and yet still finds us lovable.

Rohr and Ebert combine to produce a very readable book. Its basis in the spoken presentation gives it an ease and fluency. The language is scrupulously non-sexist with frequent illustrations for both women and men. The author's avowed hope is that "it will make us more capable of loving other people, loving ourselves — and loving God." (p.14)

We don't see how it can fail in this purpose.

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