

The Enneagram: A short history and explanation

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<https://cac.org/the-enneagram-an-introduction/#History>

The Enneagram: A (Very) Short History

The Enneagram is old. It has roots in several wisdom traditions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Seven of the nine Enneagram types are associated with the “capital” or “deadly” sins which originated with the Desert Fathers. But it was not until the late 1960s that Oscar Ichazo began teaching the Enneagram as we know it today. From Ichazo’s school in South America, a group of Jesuits learned the system and brought it back with them to the United States. Richard Rohr learned about the Enneagram from this group and was one of the first people to publish a book about it in English.

The Enneagram gained popularity as a tool within spiritual direction. Today it is widely taught as a way of understanding personality, addiction, relationships, and vocation.

The Enneagram: What It Is and What It Isn’t

The Enneagram *is* a dynamic system. It was developed primarily in an oral tradition, in the context of relationships between students and teachers. A “dynamic system” is one that recognizes that humans are far too complex and nuanced to fit easily into simple categories; it supports the evolving, maturing human journey.

The Enneagram *is not* a strict law or code. Its categories are not meant to bind or restrict you to a certain way of being and living. People who know the Enneagram in a superficial way think it’s about putting people into boxes, but it actually works to free people from their self-created boxes.

The Enneagram *is* a powerful tool for self-discovery and spiritual transformation. But it shouldn’t be your only tool. The Enneagram is most helpful when used in conjunction with other practices like study, meditation, spiritual direction, and life in community with others.

The Enneagram *is not* just a personality typing system. Yes, there are tests and quizzes that help you identify your primary Enneagram type, but that is often just the first step. This tool is meant to help you over a life-long journey.

While self-discovery is important, it *is not* the Enneagram’s final objective. The Enneagram’s purpose *is* to help us uncover the traps that keep us from living fully and freely as our True Self *so that* we will use our unique, authentic gifts for the good of others and the world.