

Preface

In recent decades, the enneagram has been nothing short of a phenomenon. Bookshops have been deluged with publications, and workshops and retreats also have helped to offer its insights to the public at large. Why then if there are so many books on the shelves, do I write this particular publication? What makes this book any different?

It's been a blessing to have spent the last twenty years journeying one-to-one with people in what in my tradition is termed "*spiritual direction*" – which in a sense is neither narrowly "spiritual" nor in any way "directive". Rather, it's about helping a person to focus upon listening to how the voice of the Spirit might want to direct them in their lives. So we pay attention to what is being suggested to them through their life events, through their relationships, through their specific and non-specific times of prayerfulness, and through the changes in their soul-seasons over a period of time.

The enneagram has been very helpful in spiritual direction – not because it provides the answers to everything, but because it assists this process of listening and naming what might be going on for us. It allows us to recognise the movements that traditionally have been called "consolation" and "desolation", or what in this book I call "*the Gaze*" and "*the Glare*". The enneagram provides a mirror for self-awareness, and to help us be conscious of why we do the things we don't want to do, and why we don't do the things we do (ref. Romans 7:15). Most importantly, it reminds us that the personalities we construct are precisely *not* who we are, because who we are is who we are already within compassionate Love of the Trinity. The enneagram helps us to identify practical spaces of opportunity and to enable grace to get at us, touch us and finally transform us.

I write this book because I believe that the enneagram can help to break open the riches of the Christian mystical tradition. The enneagram itself isn't the gospel, but it certainly can help prepare the soil for openness to the gospel – which at its core is about self-surrender, letting grace teach us about reconciliation, and allowing the crucified Christ to convert our woundedness so we can be mirrors of the healing Christ for the sake of the world's transformation.

To illustrate this parallel, I employ three images which are frequently used throughout the writings of Christian mystics:

- The image of God as an *infinite ocean*, used particularly by Catherine of Siena;
- The image of the *mirror*, used particularly by Teresa of Avila, and
- The image of *gazing upon the cross*, used particularly by Clare of Assisi.

Although these three women lived many centuries ago, their images still resonate, and they can help to bridge the best of Christian spirituality with the best of offerings from the point of view of the enneagram. This book combines my love of the Christian mystics with an appreciation of the enneagram's help for me and for countless others in becoming a little more self-aware, a little more humble, and a little more trusting of the grace and mercy of God.

I don't pretend that this book says everything on the enneagram, and I don't intend it to be a "primer". I do intend though for it to be a help for people to be aware of how God is and always has been our source, our destiny, our Lover and our home.

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Introduction

The enneagram can be misused sometimes as a way to “box” people. When someone completes a workshop or reads a book on the enneagram, there’s an understandable temptation to then proceed around their workplace, parish or community and blurt out “*Well what could we expect – she’s a SEVEN*”, or “*How predictable: you’re a TWO*”, or “*There he goes again being a ONE*”. It’s not really very helpful for anyone, and hopefully this tendency to show oneself as knowledgeable or superior will wear off after a while.

It’s important to remember that the enneagram doesn’t examine traits so much as it invites a reflection upon our **motivation**. Its focus isn’t on *what* we do, but on *why* we do it. So two people could be artists, or they could be rather volatile, but that doesn’t mean they have to be the same numbers. Although we can do similar things, we can be doing it for totally differing reasons – whether these reasons are conscious or not.

Rather than a tool for pigeonholing people, the enneagram can serve as a way into a deeper openness to understanding and compassion. It can *help to take us out of a box* by helping us to become aware of how we perceive others so narrowly – for we can and do pigeonhole people so quickly and not even realize what we’re doing. It can aid us to see how trapped we can be in our assumptions about others, so we can have a chance to move past the dead-end mantras of “*well they shouldn’t be that way*”. When we’re prepared to carry an awareness of how much we ourselves are caught in our compulsions – how we’re so addicted, trapped and mesmerized – we find that empathy for another isn’t far away.

No one’s exempt from being deeply addicted to their perceptions, and the difference isn’t between those who’ve “mastered themselves” and those who haven’t, but between those who’ve learned to humbly carry the awareness of their addictions, and those who haven’t. We all know within ourselves that we’re able to be more loving, more present to others and freer in ourselves on some days more than on other days when we’re caught in anxiety, resentment or hurt. We bounce between responding in love, and reacting from the grip of fear.

This book's descriptions of the various mirrors or reflections of God's qualities are general, and necessarily so: **there is no end to the creativity and ingenuity of God's creativity, and certainly no description is meant to categorize and compartmentalize.** Nevertheless, what these descriptions *can* do is to give general directions: broad brushstrokes that entice us to wonder over the magnificence and pleasure with which God creates us.

This book starts with the contemplation of how we've always been held within the compassionate Love of the Trinity. **It doesn't use the enneagram as a psychological tool but as a tool of spiritual awareness, and so its continuous accent is upon our response to God's initiative.** The longing for home is one of the deepest calls within the individual and collective human soul, and any move on our part to "fix ourselves" outside of Love's longing for presence, for unity and for home is doomed to failure.

So the enneagram as presented here isn't a theology of works but a theology of grace; it's all about what compassionate Love has always been doing – namely breathing everything into existence and encouraging everything to come to its fullness. It's grace from beginning to end, and into continuous new beginnings. May this approach to the enneagram help you to more richly trust the God who trusts you.

It may help when reading about the depictions of the nine aspects to look also at the numbers on either side of any with which we seem to resonate. For example, we may recognize much of the motivations of a FIVE within us, but we can't say we're completely comfortable with it. So it can help to read also the descriptions of both SIX and FOUR to see whether there is anything there which also echoes in our experience of self. This relationship with the numbers either side (usually one number more than another) is what most of us experience, and from a practical aspect it seems to make sense, since most of us are not simply two-dimensional but multi-faceted. This will be looked at in more detail in a later booklet.

The infinite ocean

Many years ago, St Catherine of Siena wrote that God is like a deep, peaceful and infinite ocean – limitless in mercy, compassion, love and truth. She said that we're like fish swimming in this sea, thirsting for more and more water to flow through us. When we let this living water flow through, we feel totally at home, and at one with all of creation.

God, then, could be described as an unbounded Sea that contains all that is – everything that has been and everything that is to come. God is the loving source of being, and without God, nothing ever could come to be. We're invited to let this living water flow over and through our gills, and so share in the very life of this nurturing and intimate Lover. This God who is Compassionate Love itself is always totally just and totally true – since God cannot be untrue to Godself.

Many people through history have used the image of the circle to describe what God is like. Amongst many others through history, St Augustine, Empedocles, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Voltaire and Blaise Pascal are said to have declared that God is like an infinite circle, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. In other words, the world is charged with the grandeur of God, as Gerard Manley Hopkins proclaimed. Every place and space is the locus for God to show God's face. As well, there is no place or space where we can be outside of God – since God is Being itself.

So if we marry Catherine of Siena's lovely picture of a compassionate sea, and the abiding concept of the Infinite Circle, then we could rightly describe God as an Infinite Circle of compassionate Love – whose water of grace is over all, through all and within all.

Everything is encircled, encompassed, enfolded and embraced within the One Presence of Love. There is nothing that's not present to the loving Gaze of God, and everything is invited to know God's Presence through coming to know how much and how deeply they are wrapped within compassionate Love.

"Eternal Trinity, you are like a deep sea, in which the more I seek, the more I find; and the more I find, the more I seek you." (Catherine of Siena 1347-1380)

"If you meet Me with the flowering desire of flowing love, then you shall soar forever, and delight - soul and body - in my Holy Trinity, immersed like a fish in the sea. For a fish cannot live long, stranded on the shore." (Mechtild of Magdeburg 1210-1280)

"Every single creature is full of God, and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God." (Meister Eckhart 1260-1327)

The Infinite Circle of Compassionate Love

The Jewish and Christian scriptures are an unfolding discovery of what the essence of God is really like. It is a gradual, pain-filled and joy-filled discovery because it happens in and through the warp and woof of human history and of human lives.

There's a saying that we don't so much see reality as it is, but rather we see it *as we are*. So it is with God: the judgmental person will see God as judgmental, and the loving person will see God as love. The Christian scriptures hold that Jesus is the human mirror of God, who reveals in time and space that God is total and absolute Love – and that there's nothing to be afraid of in God. What then are the aspects we would find in this Love?

If love is to be truly love, then it has to be **an infinite love** – and a circle is a good symbol of “forever”, for it has no beginning and no end.

“God’s goodness clothes us, enfolds us and embraces us, for we are God’s own.” (Juliana of Norwich c.1352-1413)

If love is to be truly love, then it has to be **a compassionate love** – for any other kind would be a contradiction in terms.

“No one could ever realize the kindness in God’s heart, and how tenderly God longs for us.” (Juliana of Norwich) [quoted in “God’s Loving” by Briege O’Hare, [Woman’s Song of God](#) Hermitage Productions, Louth Ireland]

If love is to be truly infinite and compassionate love, then it needs to express these features:

- Such Love must be generous, bountiful and reverencing that is – **intimately kind**.
- Such Love must be deep, dependable and forever that is – **totally trustworthy**.
- Such Love must be emboldening, expansive and honorable that is – **passionately just**.

“Mercy and faithfulness have met, justice and peace have embraced.” (Ps. 85:10-11)

“I shall enfold you into Myself for ever; I shall enfold you in respectability and justice, in faithful love and tenderness.” (Hosea 2:21)

In Micah (6:8), God asks the people to “*act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly*”. Since God couldn't ask us to grow into anything else than what God is already like, then we could safely say that this Compassionate Love can be described also in these terms of acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly:

- **“loving tenderly” is an echo of God’s intimate kindness**
- **“walking humbly” is an echo of God’s total trustworthiness**
- **“acting justly” is an echo of God’s passionate justice**

In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul longs for his hearers to come to an openness to God's justice, trustworthiness and kindness that is revealed in Jesus – and he writes exquisitely of the dimensions of this Love:

“May you have the power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:18-19)

The infinite ocean of God

brings forth and sustains
the length, breadth and height/depth of compassionate Love
through

- **Intimate kindness (“loving tenderly”)**

*The “length” or durability of kindness is offered in **graciousness***

*The “breadth” or vitality of kindness is renewed in **fruitfulness***

*The “height/depth” or profundity of kindness is revered in **mystery***

- **Total trustworthiness (“walking humbly”)**

*The “height/depth” or profundity of trust is beheld in **wisdom***

*The “length” or durability of trust is honored in **faithfulness***

*The “breadth” or vitality of trust is celebrated in **delight***

- **Passionate justice (“acting justly”)**

*The “breadth” or vitality of justice is energized in **empowerment***

*The “height/depth” or profundity of justice is matured in **spaciousness***

*The “length” or durability of justice is focused in **attentiveness***

These aspects of God's love could be illustrated diagrammatically, as follows: