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A REFLECTION ON *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*, No. 19

One of the more fascinating themes in *The Secret Doctrine* is that of Hierarchy. The English language confines the word *hierarchy* mainly to ecclesiastical matters, and so the general public remains unaware of its occult denotations. Due to its association in the public mind with priestly matters, the term carries certain negative connotations — rigidity, dominance, and exploitation, for instance. But the esoteric meaning of hierarchy as presented in *The Secret Doctrine* is one that inspires awe and wonder, revealing a hidden natural order involving various planes, or levels, of existence as well as a vast multitude of beings. This panoramic view has been described by at least one writer as the cosmic ladder of life.

The strange-sounding names of the hierarchical beings appearing on the pages of Mme. Blavatsky's magnum opus read like the cast of a Federico Fellini film: Architects, Builders and Silent Watchers; Kumaras and Pitris and Agnishvattas; Elementals, Asuras, and Dhyân-Chohans; Lipikas and Lahs and Mânasaputras. All of this is likely to leave the first-time reader feeling as bewildered as a Norwegian cook who stumbled into an Indian spice shop. But with continued study the names grow familiar and their respective roles come into focus. It gradually becomes clear that each planetary or celestial being has its special role to play in the greater economy of the divine plan.

Some may find the idea of a cosmic hierarchy to be fanciful, if not preposterous. But is it really? Consider, for example, a large corporation employing tens of thousands of people. It is structured so that its manifold operations—finance and accounting, advertising and marketing, engineering and production, research and development—are all set up as separate departments run by competent managers, whose business it is to see that each unit carries out its part smoothly and efficiently. We live in an intelligent and purposeful universe. “As above, so below,” says the Hermetic axiom. If a mere human enterprise recognizes the value of organization, should we expect any less of the universe?

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