



Rosa Veritas
Learning

You and the **Spiritual Hierarchies**

Study Topic 1

The Hierarchies
An introduction

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STUDY TOPIC 1

The Hierarchies

An introduction

Much effort and money is being spent today on trying to find intelligent life in other places in our solar system. These efforts have not been successful, but they continue because there is a great desire in human beings to know that we are not alone in the universe. To people in past ages there was no question but that we were surrounded by many other beings. Stars and planets were not whirling masses of rock and gas; they were spiritual powers. The clouds, the winds, the lightning all were manifestations of the presence of spiritual intelligences. The elements of fire, air, water and earth, plants and animals were all ensouled. Through the ancient clairvoyant powers human beings once had, these spirits could be perceived. As our thinking powers have increased, this perception of spirit has become dimmed and we have increasingly taken the scientific view of the world and the universe that sends us on the search for proof of other forms of intelligent life.

In 1982, a Dutch doctor named Moolenburgh began asking his patients, "Have you ever seen an angel?" He asked this question of 400 people and recorded their responses, which provided a cross-section of the attitudes of people today to the idea of the existence of spiritual beings. Some people contemplated deeply before responding, others burst out laughing, some were astonished, others had a very matter of fact response. Some people became radiant, others showed interest and co-operation. Some were negative while others were decisive or serious. The significant thing for Moolenburgh was that for 89% of those questioned it was not a superficial question and he concluded, "Western man is not quite as materialistic as many people think." 68 of the 400 people reported strange experiences, such as a strong sense of being guided through a dangerous situation, visions, out-of-body experiences, or contact with a friend or relative who had died. These had occurred spontaneously and without any intervention from mediums, use of drugs or other external inducement. In other words more than one-sixth of those questioned had had an experience that could be interpreted as an experience of the spiritual worlds, and a number of these could be termed encounters with an angel.

Today, bookshops are flooded with books on angels and how to communicate with them, people around the world are claiming to channel angels, and angelic jewellery and nick-nacks are to be found in many stores. The New Age discovered angels! A huge number of angel sites are to be found on the Internet – and some are better than others (most of them not worth looking at). Nevertheless what this demonstrates is a growing desire to experience something beyond the physical world and to be in touch again with the spiritual dimension of life in which we once moved naturally.

God Is Not Alone

The teachings concerning the spiritual hierarchies tell us that God does not inhabit the heavens alone. The Old Testament speaks about God as the Lord of hosts. He is pictured in the heavens, surrounded by the heavenly hosts.

All the major religions – Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism – hold that there is a world of spiritual beings, invisible to the physical eye, which interpenetrates and weaves into the physical world in which we live. This is also true of indigenous religions. Although there are differences in the way in which these beings are described, there is agreement that the spiritual worlds are full of life and activity.

These spiritual beings form a bridge between God and humanity. One very vivid image of this is the dream recorded in Genesis chapter 28 in which Jacob dreamt that there was a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. He perceived the activity of the angels who are messengers – that's what the word angel means – bringing messages from the heavens to earth and bearing back to the heavens what they receive from the earth.

We cannot prove by rational means the existence of this world and of these beings. But if we accept as a working hypothesis that such a world and such beings exist, and act on that hypothesis, knowledge – inner gnosis – will grow within us of the reality of this world. Eventually, if we persist on the path, we will come to perceive this world for ourselves through the opening up of clairvoyant perception.

The Idea of a Hierarchy

Not only do all the major religions teach the existence of angelic beings, they also recognise that there is a hierarchy within the heavens. For instance, in Hinduism, Brahman is recognised as the high god who manifests in three aspects: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. Below this are the seven great elements – akasha, fire, air, water and earth, and two more still to

manifest. Below these are the ranks of devas or angels descending from the greatest to the lesser elementals. Other religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism all acknowledge a spiritual hierarchy, even though the details and names by which these beings are known differ.

In today's world, the idea of hierarchies is not popular, because of the abuse of power that has often been part of hierarchical societies or organisations. Opposition to the idea of hierarchy often comes out of muddled thinking which confuses "essentially of equal value" with "is the same". A hierarchy, in the best sense, recognises that the people within it have different functions, and that when all work together to carry out their function to the best of their ability, the purpose of the group is fulfilled in an effective way.

In a business, which is a hierarchical organisation with levels of management, it is important that the responsibilities of each person and the relationships between people are clear. But something more is necessary, and that is a genuine valuing of each person and their contribution to the whole. Although this is a very mundane example, we can think of the spiritual hierarchies functioning in a similar manner. There are two principles that characterise the hierarchies:

1. **The lower serves the higher.** We recognise this principle in our own existence. The mineral kingdom, plants and animals, which are below us in evolution, provide us with food and shelter, work, companionship. They serve us, as we in turn serve the spiritual hierarchies, and the lower spiritual hierarchies serve the beings above them. Through the service of the lower, the higher is also transformed.
2. **The higher needs and therefore cares for the lower.** If this principle is absent in any earthly hierarchy, we see abuse and a devaluing of people. If this principle is not active in the way we relate to our planet, we exploit the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms. Woven into the fabric of the spiritual hierarchies is the principle of genuine love and responsibility towards those beings at a less advanced stage of development who yet are necessary for the development of the higher.

The Hierarchies of Dionysius

So let us now think about the beings who make up the spiritual hierarchies. In western esoteric teachings, the heavenly beings are divided into three hierarchies, each of three orders, making a total of nine orders. What is the source of this teaching?

In the latter part of the fifth century, a monk, probably from Syria, wrote several important works, one of which was called *The Celestial*

STUDY TASKS

Written Task #1

1. Look for examples in daily life of how the lower serves the higher and the higher serves the lower. Make a list of these, and for each one note which principle is working, how it is expressed, and what the outcome is for each of the parties.
2. Choose two or three passages from the Old Testament **and** two or three passages from the New Testament from the list below. Read them closely and answer the following questions for each of the passages.
 - a) Where does the spiritual being appear?
 - b) Where did the spiritual being come from and/or how did it get there?
 - c) Describe the spiritual being in as much detail as possible.
 - d) To whom does the spiritual being appear (name and circumstances)?
 - e) What is the message of the spiritual being?
 - f) How does the receiver react to the message?
 - g) List other points that caught your interest.
 - h) Which of these stories do you relate to most strongly? Why?

Old Testament

- Genesis 16
- Genesis 22
- Genesis 28:10-13
- Genesis 32:22-32
- Exodus 3:2
- Exodus 23:20-23
- Exodus 25:16-22
- Numbers 22:22-41
- Judges 6:11-32
- Judges 13
- 1 Chronicles 21
- Ezekiel 10
- Ezekiel 41:18-25

New Testament

- Matthew 13:36-43
- Matthew 28:1-8
- Mark 13:24-32
- Luke 1
- Luke 2:8-15
- John 1:52
- John 5:1-5
- Acts 10:1-8
- Acts 12:6-11
- Hebrews 1 & 2
- Revelation

Creative Expression #1

1. Use artwork, a poem, a prayer or some other form of creative expression that communicates something of your response to or understanding of this study topic, or some aspect of it.

Throughout the unit, work with a variety of expressions. You don't have to be experienced or have any great skill at a form of expression for it to be of value in your learning.

REFERENCES

Further Reading

The following have been referenced in the writing of Study Topic 1. You may like to draw on some of these texts for further reading and study.

- Bittleston, Adam, *Our Spiritual Companions*. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1983.
- Louth, Andrew. *Denys the Areopagite*. Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989.
- Moolenburgh, HC, *A Handbook of Angels*. Saffron Walden: The C W Daniel Company Ltd, 1984.
- Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite. *Pseudo-Dionysius: the Complete Works (Classics of Western Spirituality)*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Rorem, Paul. "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius" in Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq (eds), *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. London: SCM Press, 1989.
- Schoenmaker, Mario, *The Ultimate Vision*. Melbourne: ICA Press, 1984. (*The third edition, 2013, is now available in four volumes plus companion reading, in both print and digital format.*)