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Becoming like God' according to Proclus' Interpretations of the *Timaeus*, the Eleusinian Mysteries and the *Chaldaean Oracles*

This paper examines Proclus' interpretation of the Platonic notion of 'becoming like god' against the background of Plato's *Timaeus*. With most commentators, both ancient and modern, Proclus agrees that 'becoming like god' consists in the return of the soul to its origin, hence to the Demiurge and his *kratêr*. For Proclus, this takes the form of a return to the divine demiurgical Intellect in which the soul finds rest and is able to contemplate the Forms. He finds himself in disagreement, though, about the question how exactly this return is to be achieved.

It is commonly understood that Plato summons us in the *Timaeus* to engage in the study of the eternal and unchanging truths of mathematical astronomy and thus become participants in the eternal, i.e. the divine. Proclus denies this. He follows Iamblichus who had argued in the *De Mysteriis* that only ritual acts, not intellectual efforts, can make us truly divine, as well as the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the holy scriptures of the Athenian Neoplatonists, that warn people to flee the scientific study of the universe, if they want "to enter the sacred paradise of piety".

Proclus puts his trust in mystery rites that include ritual purifications, like the Eleusinian Mysteries and the rites connected with the *Chaldaean Oracles*. These are supposed to separate the soul of the initiate from the body. He refers to this separation as 'death', a conception that is partially rooted in Plato's own writings. The soul, thus separated, is now supposed to contemplate the Forms in the divine Mind, i.e. the demiurgical Intellect.

A special role in this process of separation and return is reserved here for the goddess that is also the cause of life for the soul, since according to the general law of Proclus' metaphysics, there can be no emanation from a cause without reversion upon it. This life-bringing goddess, who manifests herself on different levels of reality, consists of Rhea, Demeter, and Persephone in the Orphic-Eleusinian Mysteries and Hecate in the Chaldaean tradition. She is equated with the *kratêr* of the *Timaeus*, not with the World Soul as is commonly assumed, especially in the case of Hecate. The fact that Proclus is able to read back the theology of the *Chaldaean Oracles* into the *Timaeus* need not come as a surprise. For, as Luc Brisson has shown, the authors of the *Chaldaean Oracles* had re-utilized a Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Timaeus* in order to provide a context for the vicissitudes of the human soul.

Marinus' reports about Proclus' life corroborate this interpretation. He informs us that Proclus actively participated in both Orphic and Chaldaean purificatory rituals. According to him, these rituals, considered as part of the so-called purificatory virtues, were supposed to separate body from soul, and hence make the participant like god. In a next stage the now godlike Proclus was able to contemplate the Forms which are in the divine Mind.