Could the 'formulas' dying and rising with Christ be expressions of Pauline mysticism?

Gert M M Pelser

ABSTRACT
As to whether the above-mentioned formulas are expressions of Pauline mysticism depends on the one hand on what can possibly be regarded as the religio-historical background of the concept, and on the other, on the results of an exegesis of the relevant passages in the letters of Paul. As far as the former is concerned, it remains difficult to locate a specific background. Regarding the latter, Rm 6:1-11 is without a doubt the most well-known and prominent passage to take note of, while the idea of dying and rising with Christ is also present in 2 Cor 4:10-11; 5:14-15; Gl 2:19-20; 6:14,17; and Phlp 3:10-11. The key to answering our question is to be found in Rm 6:3 where baptism is referred to as \( \varepsilon \iota \varsigma \chi r\varphi\alpha\tau\omicron\nu \iota \eta\rho\sigma\alpha\omicron\nu \) (see also Gl 2:27), which is then qualified at the same time as a baptism \( \varepsilon \iota \varsigma \tau \psi \nu \theta\acute{\alpha} \nu \mu\alpha\tau\omicron\vartheta\omicron \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron \omicron \) . From this it is to be concluded that Paul was thinking of the event(s) of dying and rising with Christ as the result of the believer’s becoming one with Christ (or \( \epsilon\nu \chi r\varphi\alpha\tau\omicron\omicron \) ) through baptism. If it is to be assumed that Paul’s \( \epsilon\nu \chi r\varphi\alpha\tau\omicron\omicron \) formula denotes some mystical union between Christ and the believer, which in all probability is the case, it seems that the formulas dying and rising with Christ are not, as such, expressions of Pauline mysticism but rather expressions of the consequence of this 'mystical' union.

1 INTRODUCTION
Before trying to answer the question formulated in the title of this paper it seems obvious that one should first determine which of Paul’s pronouncements in this regard should come under scrutiny. All would agree that the most well-known, classical, example of these is Romans 6:1-11. Reference is usually also made to 2 Corinthians 4:10-11; 5:14-15; Galatians 2:19-20; 6:14,17 and Philippians 3:10-11. Each of these passages naturally has its own background and context, although it is not to be denied that each of them gives expression, in one way or another, to the notion of dying or dying and rising with Christ. Although this notion is not explicitly expressed in Galatians 3:27-28, the passage is as a rule also considered when Romans 6 is discussed. The reason for this is obviously the fact that, as in Romans 6:3, there is also talk in this passage of baptism \( \varepsilon \iota \varsigma \chi r\varphi\alpha\tau\omicron\omicron \) (cf 1 Cor 12:13: \( \varepsilon \iota \varsigma \varepsilon\upsilon \sigma\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron \) ). As already stated above, however, Romans 6 takes precedence over the other passages, and for this reason it will be at the centre of our attention in what follows.

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2 BACKGROUND

It is to be assumed that what Paul said in Romans 6 about baptism and about dying and rising with Christ, must have been intelligible within a certain semantic horizon or against a specific religio-historical background. What this background was or where we have to look for it, is a major problem not only as far as the topic of this study is concerned, but also with regard to what this pericope is actually saying about the meaning of baptism as such. It seems that most exegetes are of the opinion that we should look for a Hellenistic environment. Thus Reitzenstein (1927:81) on the one hand rejected the notion that baptism or the Lord’s supper can be explained against a Jewish background, and on the other contended that certain figures of speech and words used by Paul show a relationship with the mystery religions. Among these are expressions like βαπτιζομαι εἰς τὸν θανάτον and συνθάπτων διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θανάτον (Rm 6:3–4) ‘...die sich in allen diesen Religionen, am deutlichsten freilich wohl in der phrygischen Bluttaufe wiederfinden lassen’ (Reitzenstein 1927:82). This position was also held by Bultmann (1968:144, mysteries as well as Gnosticism) and also by others in recent times (see among others Maccoby 1991:128; Schmithals 1994:104; Betz 1995:108). Betz (1995:117) argues that in earliest Christianity baptism was gradually carried over from Judaism toward the Hellenistic environment, starting with John the Baptist and becoming fully hellenised in Paul. But even if it is to be conceded that the background is Hellenistic, we still have to determine exactly what from this background is at issue here.

This ‘Hellenistic’ approach has, however, not remained unchallenged. Dunn (1982:261), for one, contends that it is to be doubted that the notion of the union of the initiate and the cult god was so widespread in mystery religions as was traditionally assumed. He therefore regards direct influence from the mystery cults on Paul or on the theology of Romans 6:3–4 as most unlikely, but concedes that a broader similarity remains (1988:310). He finds support in Wedderburn (1987a:56) who argues that Paul’s characteristic ‘with Christ’ language was definitely not part of the manner in which the adherents of the mystery cults interpreted their rites. To this he adds: ‘It is notoriously hard to find any parallel to Paul’s usage in this passage (Rm 6:1–11, GMMP) in contemporary Greek writings independent of Paul, let alone in the few scattered references that we have to the beliefs and practices of the mysteries’ (1987a:56). He also pointed out that it is very difficult to find proof of the initiate’s dying and rising with the deity in the mystery cults (1987a:57; thus already Kennedy 1913:227–228; cf Schweitzer 1930:16). What becomes clear from studies like Wedderburn’s is that we are confronted in the case of the mysteries with the same problem as with Gnosticism, namely that there is no unified structure, and that it cannot in a generalising way be
said that this or that was a characteristic feature of the mystery cults. Each mystery had its own rite with its own meaning attached to it. What is more, the few pieces of information from the mystery cults that are usually put forward as being parallel to Romans 6 come, with one exception, not from adherents of these cults, but from writers writing 'about' them. It is also well-known that Schweitzer (1948:191–192) and others have drawn attention to two problems regarding the mystery cults as possible background to early Christianity, namely that they only experienced their hey-day during the second and third centuries CE and that they were then transformed and reinterpreted to such an extent that we can have only limited knowledge of what they were like during the first century. Schweitzer therefore accuses almost all the popular writings of his day of manufacturing '...out of the various fragments of information a kind of universal Mystery religion which never actually existed, least of all in Paul's day' (1948:192–193; see also Zeller 1994:520; pace Lohse 1971:172–173). Although this can be granted to a high degree, it does not mean that the mysteries were unpopular and without influence, as several scholars have also pointed out. Wedderburn is therefore right in saying that '...the evidence suggests what is in fact a priori likely, that they (the mysteries, GMMP) already enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity during the two preceding centuries...' (1987b:99; see also: 138–139).

2.1 Firmicus Maternus

To give us some idea of what the issue is here, it would be worth our while to look at the evidence that is usually presented. As proof of his contention that Romans 6 has parallels in Hellenistic mystery religions Reitzenstein quotes from Firmicus Maternus' *De errore profanarum religionum* (22:2) concerning initiation into a mystery cult of which the name is not mentioned, and then in particular the words handed down in their original Greek form by Firmicus, and not translated by him into Latin. These are the words used by the priest to console the initiates who, with a statue of the god lying on a bier in front of them, are bemoaning the death of their god, namely: Θαρεῖτε μέντα τοῦ θεοῦ σωσμένον ἐσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ τόνων σωτηρία (Be full of courage, initiates, because since the god has been saved, we will also be saved from suffering). However, these words by themselves give no indication of a baptism, and much less of a Bluttaufe. Unfortunately Reitzenstein does not indicate which Bluttaufe he has in mind. Pistorius (1943:11), referring to Reitzenstein's remark, is convinced that it must be the Taurobolium, the rite of the Cybele-Attis cult, that Reitzenstein is thinking of (thus also Maccoby 1991:128). However, the problem with this is that there is not a word in Firmicus about any of the characteristic features of the Taurobolium as described by Prudentius, a Christian writer of the fourth century CE, and
our only source on this matter (*Peristephanon* 10.1008–1050). Firmicus makes no mention of any of the basic components of the ceremony as related by Prudentius: a person descending into a deep trench (*sub terram scrobe*, 1011) underneath a timber platform (*pulpita*, 1016) upon which a bull's breast is cut open (*pectus...dividunt*, 1027) and through which its blood pours like rain onto the person in the trench. It is also important to note that the person that took part in this ceremony was not an initiate but the high priest (*summus sacerdos*, 1011; *pontifex*, 1043), and that he did it in order to be consecrated or deified (*consecrandus*, 1012). For this reason he is saluted and revered by all the officiating priests (*omnes salutant atque adorant*, 1048). These observations clearly show that although the *Taurobolium* can possibly be described as ‘eine Art Bluttaufe’, it was definitely not an initiation rite (rightly so Leipoldt 1960:1235).

What, then, is Firmicus trying to do? He is comparing the ointment of Christian confirmation with the ointment of the mystery deity (see Forbes 1970:93), stating in the process that at a certain point during the ceremony the throats of the initiates who are bemoaning the death of the god are ‘anointed’ by the priest, and that the above-mentioned words of consolation are then spoken to them. Even if it is to be concluded that a new life or a resurrection is envisaged in the words ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν σωτηρία, the ceremony that is being described here is clearly not a baptism but an anointing, the very reason why Firmicus compares it with Christian confirmation and not Christian baptism. Furthermore, no mention is made of any dying and rising of the initiates ‘with’ the deity, but only that, like the deity, they will also be ‘saved’. According to Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 54) it was believed that the soul of Osiris was eternal and indestructible, but that his body was frequently dismembered and destroyed by Typhon. The promise of a σωτηρία given by the priest is, however, ridiculed by Firmicus when he addresses the devotees of this cult with the words: ‘The death of your god is known, but his life is not apparent, nor has a divine prophecy ever issued a statement about his resurrection, nor has he manifested himself to men after his death to cause himself to be believed’ (22:3). What we must remember, is that we have before us a Christian portrayal of the ceremony concerned, and that it is possible that we are not fully informed about the matter. But we have at the same time no reason to believe that Firmicus would have deliberately suppressed the idea of dying and rising ‘with’ the deity if it was indeed part of the ceremony.

There are also other ‘parallels’ that are usually referred to in connection with Paul’s words in Romans 6:3–5 (see Strecker & Schnelle 1996:122–126): firstly, two passages in Apuleius’ *Metamorphosis*; secondly, an inscription on two golden lamellae found in a woman’s grave in Thessaly (end fourth
2.2 Apuleius

In the case of Apuleius, there are two statements in the first passage (*Met 11.21.7*) that deserve our attention. The first states that the act of initiation into the mysteries of Isis ‘...is fulfilled as a voluntary death and as a salvation brought about by grace’ (*traditionem ad instar voluntariae mortis et precariae salutis celebrari*). What is meant by ‘voluntary death’ is not at all clear, for as we shall see later no mention is made of any ‘dying’ of the initiate during the initiation rite. It is furthermore worthy of note that there is no talk of being ‘restored to life’, but of being ‘saved’. The second statement deals with those who in old age are standing at the utmost limit of life and to whom the secrets of the goddess’ religion may be entrusted. Of these people it is said that they are ‘...being after a manner born again through the providence of the goddess, chosen and restored by her to a new course of life’ (*elicere et sua providentia quodam modo renatos ad novae reponere rursus salutis curricula*). In this case the people concerned are not dead already, but only ‘standing at the utmost limit of life’. It is therefore understandable that it is not said that they are restored to life, but that they are ‘after a manner born again to a new course of life’. It is clearly a renewal of their existing life that is at issue here and not a new life after death. The second passage (*Met 11.23.1–9*) describes Lucius’ (the hero in the story) preparation for his initiation into the Isis mysteries, as well as what was experienced by him as a result of his initiation. Regarding the preparation it is said that after Lucius ‘...had taken the customary (normal) bath, the priest washed him by sprinkling him all round with the purest water, having first implored the pardon of the Gods’ (*et prius sueto lavacro traditum, prae/atus deum venUtm, purissime circumrorans abluit, 23.1–2*). He then gives a fairly lengthy description of his initiation of which only the following are of interest to our question: ‘I approached the confines of death, and having trod on the threshold of Proserpine, I returned therefrom, being borne through all the elements (*Accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine per omnia vectus elementa remeavl*). At midnight I saw the sun shining with its brilliant light (*solem candido coruscantem lumine, 23.7*); and I approached the presence of the gods beneath and the gods of heaven, and stood near, and worshipped them’. He then goes on to say that he was dressed in twelve stoles (*duodecim stolis, 24.1*) and a precious upper garment (*pretiosa chlamida, 24.2*), that he appeared adorned like the sun (*ad instar Solis exornato, 24.4*), that he was exposed to the gaze of the multitude, and that after this, he celebrated the most joyful day of his initiation, as his birthday (*festissimum celebravi natalem sacrorum, 24.4*). A number of things become
clear from these passages. Firstly, it is shown that a ritual cleansing (baptism?) was part of the initiation rite at least of the Isis mystery cult. Secondly, nothing is said about a dying of the initiate, but only of his approaching ‘the confines of death’. However, the fact that the initiation rite was earlier referred to as a voluntary death and that the change that has taken place in the life of the initiate is compared to a rebirth, is in all probability an indication that this rite was conceived of as a dying and rising of some sort. If this was indeed the case, it is quite possible that this rite could serve as an analogy of the notion of dying and rising in Romans 6. The fact that the *Metamorphosis* dates from the early part of the second century CE, is no reason to exclude the probability that a ‘baptism’ and the notion of dying and rising were already in Paul’s day part and parcel of initiation into the Isis mysteries. It must, however, be noted that the ritual cleansing or ‘baptism’ was only part of a more comprehensive initiation ceremony in which the revelation of the mysteries concerned must have played the dominant role. The event of dying and rising was therefore not effected by the ritual cleansing as such but by the initiation ceremony in its entirety. This ceremony can thus only be regarded as parallel to Paul’s concept of Christian baptism in so far as the initiate was ‘baptised’, and has died and risen again through the rite of initiation.

2.3 Thessalian lamellae

Regarding the inscription on the Thessalian lamellae, it is the first line that is of importance to our question, namely the words: ιнные έθανες και ιнные έγένεν, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τώδε (Now, on this day, you have died, and you have been born, three times blessed). What is clearly expressed here is the belief that the day of death was seen simultaneously as the day of rebirth. It is, however, not said how this rebirth was supposed to be effected. No mention is made of any ceremony that took place or any act through which it was accomplished. There is consequently no indication that it should be treated as parallel to Romans 6:3–5, the only resemblance being the belief that death is terminated by the beginning of a new life.

2.4 Plutarch

Lastly, then, there are the remarks made by Plutarch (recorded by Stobaios in his ΠΕΡΙ ΖΩΗΣ 52b.49, see Hense 1958:1089) in which he compares what happens to the soul of a person after death with what is experienced by those who undergo initiation. In the first place he states that when a person dies, the soul ‘experiences the same as those who have been initiated into the great mysteries’ (τότε δὲ πάσχει πάθος οἶν οἱ τελεταίς μεγάλαις κατοργιαξό-
μενοί). He then goes on to say that after wandering about in darkness and after suffering terrifying experiences (τὰ δεινὰ πάντα), the initiate is met by a wonderful light (φῶς τι βαυμάσιον) and welcomed by open country and meadow lands (τόποι καθαροὶ καὶ λειμώνες ἐδέξαντο), where there are voices and dancing and the solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions (φωνὰς καὶ χορείας καὶ σεμνότητας ἁγιομάτων ἱερῶν καὶ φασμάτων ἁγίων ἑσόντες), and that he then keeps company with holy and chaste people (σύνεστιν ὁσίως καὶ καθαροῖς ἀνδράσι). There is no doubt about it that the portrayal of what is experienced by the initiate, places in sharp contrast that which precedes and that which follows the act or moment of initiation: wonderful light over darkness; open country and meadow lands with voices and dancing, solemn majesty, sacred music and holy visions and keeping company with holy and chaste people over the suffering of terrifying experiences. And although nothing is said about dying and rising, there is no question about the radical change that is presumed to have taken place in the life and circumstances of the initiate. Notwithstanding this fact, it does not seem to render enough evidence to support the claim that Paul’s idea of baptism as expressed in Romans 6 could have been influenced by what was taking place in this cultic practice.

2.5 Conclusion
What have we learned from all this? Not much as far as Hellenism as a possible backdrop is concerned. It has been shown that the only piece of evidence that may be taken into account as a probable parallel is the description given by Apuleius of Lucius’ initiation into the Isis mysteries. But as we have seen, this can only be regarded as a parallel to a certain extent. Apart from what has already been remarked on in this regard, it must be pointed out that it is nowhere said that Lucius was baptised ‘into’ Isis, or that he died or was buried or was raised ‘with’ Osiris. This is apparently not only the case with the Isis cult but also with all the other mystery cults (see Zeller 1994:518, 520). It is interesting at this point to note the findings of Schlarb (1990) in a study on how the early church fathers up until Origenes (which includes names like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Hippolytus, and Clement of Alexandria) interpreted Romans 6:1-11. Schlarb has established that all of these fathers constantly regarded faith as a prerequisite for baptism, and that they were much more interested in the meaning of Romans 6:1-11 than in its possible background. On the basis of all this Schlarb concludes: ‘Das Moment der μετάνοια als konstituierendes Glied der Taufhandlung insgesamt macht eine Beziehung des Taufverständnisses dieser Zeit zum mysterien-kultischen Denken äußerst unwahrscheinlich’ (1990:235). It is more than just
remarkable that these fathers never even considered the possibility of a Hel­
lenistic influence on Paul. Did they suppress such an idea on purpose or were
they just not aware of any clear-cut evidence that could support it? On the
other hand, if Christianity was not at all influenced by the mysteries, why
did the apologists take so much trouble to slate these cults as imitations of
the Christian sacraments (see Zeller 1994:520)? Perhaps Meyer has a point by
saying that the most balanced and judicious interpretation of the relationship
would acknowledge the parallel development of the mysteries and
Christianity, and that similarities can in certain instances be ascribed to the
fact that they had to address similar social and religious needs of the Graeco-
Roman world of their time (1992:944).

If it is to be conceded that not much can be presented as definite proof
that Paul’s concept of baptism as a dying and rising with Christ was
influenced by the mystery cults, what is then to be said about the possibility
that he may have been influenced by the ‘mysticism’ of the mystery cults? It
seems that this issue is as problematic as the one just discussed. A statement
that has often been heard from different scholars is that some form of union
with, and conformity to, the deity was an essential ingredient of the mystery-
cults. Implicit in this is the idea that the god with whom the devotees are
united, is one who has died and come to life again, and that through initia-
tion the initiate shares the god’s destiny, thus sharing in the death and new
life of the god (cf Wedderburn 1987b:296–297). But, as we have already seen,
not even our prime piece of evidence, namely Apuleius’ description of the
initiation of Lucius reports anything about the initiate becoming united with
Isis or conformed to the fate of Osiris (cf Dunn 1988:310). The only instance
of identification, in some sense, took place in Egyptian funerary rites, which
were ‘...performed on the dead to speed their passage to a happy after-life, it
is not performed on the living to give assurance that after death they will pass
to this after-life’ (Wedderburn 1987b:310). Wedderburn’s thorough investiga-
tion (1987b:296–359) has shown that what applies to the Isis-Osiris cults, also
applies to all the others. In the case of the initiation reported by Firmicus the
chief point is that the worshippers are bemoaning the dead deity, not that
they are expected to identify themselves with the one bemoaned. Wedder-
burn is correct in maintaining that mourning was the dominant character of
the rites, and that it was with the bereaved partner that these rites enabled
the practitioners to identify (1987b:327). Thus the devotees joined Isis and
Cybele in mourning their dead lovers, Attis and Osiris, and Demeter her
dead daughter, Kore. The nearest that one can come to the idea of conform-
ing to the sufferings of a god is perhaps the self-castration of the devotees of
Attis.

We have seen that the devotees are in some way identified with the cult
deity, and priests, priestesses and worshippers seem often in the ancient
world to have been seen and depicted wearing the clothes and insignia of their deities. This was also said about the way in which Lucius was dressed and how he appeared after his initiation. Whether his appearance 'adorned like the sun' was supposed to identify him with the solar Horus is not certain. The fact is, however, that he is not identified with Isis in the sense that he became deified. To him Isis still remains the goddess: he supplicantly gives her thanks (supplicue gratis, 24:6), prostrates himself before her, and lauds her in a way that only befits a deity. After his initiation he also worshipped the gods 'from above and below'. All this indicates that the wearing of divine dress does not symbolise deification or admittance to the ranks of the gods, but rather 'fellowship with the gods, dedication and belonging to the one whose garb is worn, and at the same time the possession in one's life of the divine qualities and powers characteristic of that deity' (Wedderburn 1987b:337). It seems therefore that although one can speak of the initiate sharing in the powers of the deity and becoming godlike or in a certain sense a divine being, there is no proof in the mysteries of the deification of the initiate in the real sense of the word. If this is to be granted, the notion of a mystical union between the devotee and the cult god seems very doubtful, to say the least.

Zeller (1994:518) contends that even the ecstatic fusion with the deity of the fanatics in the mysteries of Dionysus, Sabazius and Cybele cannot be described as a mystic union.

As can be expected, the mystery cults are not the only possible background that has been considered thus far. Schweitzer, who was such a strong proponent of the idea of mysticism in Paul, is a remarkable example in this regard. Not only did he not look for a Hellenistic analogy, he even considered Paul's mysticism as un-Hellenistic. As a matter of fact, he made a clear distinction between Paul's mysticism and that of the mysteries by pointing out that while Hellenistic mysticism was based on the notion of deification, that of Paul was based on the idea of fellowship with the divine being. He does not become what Christ is, but '...bleibt einfach bei dem Gedanken stehen, daß er mit Christo Gemeinschaft hat und auf diese Weise das Erleben Christi teilt' (1930:16; see also Bousset 1913:115). Sellin (1983:230; 1996:15), on the other hand, is of the opinion that what is expressed in Romans 6 is a combination of Hellenistic-Jewish spiritualism (life as the reception of the Spirit in baptism) and apocalyptic (resurrection of the bodies at the parousia), while Wedderburn (1987a:72) thinks that we should rather look for parallels in the Old Testament where the idea of 'solidarity' with the ancestors and of the 'representation' of the group by an individual is well-known. For this reason he is also 'thoroughly appreciative' of the idea expressed by the term 'corporate personality' (1987b:352). According to him it is against this background that Romans 6 should be
understood as referring to baptism as an event in which the believer experiences solidarity with the Adam of the end-time, Jesus Christ. We should not have a problem with the idea of the believer becoming one with Christ through baptism, but in my opinion this does not say enough. For this reason it is also not enough to explain the notion of dying and rising with Christ by means of the concept of 'corporate personality'. Apart from the fact that this concept has thus far not succeeded in gaining a foothold in scholarly opinion, it seems to me that it just cannot fully accommodate the true character of the believer’s union with Christ.

3 WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?

It seems that in order to find an answer to our question from the Pauline texts that can be regarded as relevant to the issue, one should start with the formula (βαπτίζοντα γίνεσθαι) εἰς Χριστόν in Romans 6:3. It is common knowledge that most exegetes do not interpret this formula as having a local reference in the sense of the believer’s incorporation with Christ, but as an abbreviated form of εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. As a consequence of this approach, the formula is not interpreted ‘mystically’ but as expression of the believer’s appropriation for Christ or her/his transition to Christ’s ownership (see inter alia Barrett 1971:122, probably; Cranfield 1975:301; Schlier 1979:192; Wilckens 1980:11; Schlarb 1990:48). The argument that is usually put forward against the possibility of reading the formula in a locative sense, is that the same should then also apply to εἰς τὸν Μωύσῃ ἐβαπτίζοντο in 1 Corinthians 10:2, which is obviously unacceptable. This argument, however, is not valid, because there is, grammatically speaking, no reason why a local reference of εἰς in Romans 6 should automatically also apply to the Moses-phrase in the Corinthian passage. And what is more, as we all know, meaning is not determined by grammatical form alone but by the context as well. That εἰς in Romans 6:3 can and should be interpreted in a local sense is supported by Galatians 3:27 in connection with which Betz (1995:107–108) correctly argues that the expression Χριστὸν ἐνέδυσαν is the explanation of the preceding εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, which clearly points in the direction of a local reference of εἰς in this context (pace Longenecker 1990:155, ‘with reference to Christ’). For this reason it should be regarded as highly unlikely that εἰς in Romans 6:3, which is in a certain sense a repetition of Galatians 3:27, can be interpreted in any other than a locative sense (see also Hübner 1993:291). It must, however, be pointed out that ‘locative sense’ can also be understood as referring to another kind of locality, namely the ‘domain’ of Christ. Several scholars interpret the formula in this way, for example Keck who contends: ‘To be baptized into Christ is to be included in the domain of Christ, his field of force’ (1979:58). Although Käsemann (1974:155–156)
rejects the mystical interpretation of Romans 6:3, he nevertheless maintains that the passage can only be understood as referring to the believer's integration into the new Adam. In this connection one can also refer to Hellholm who is of the opinion that Paul presumably meant the eic-construction to be of polysemic character in order that the readers should understand it according to their own baptismal tradition. It could thus be understood as either eic το δρόμος or eic το σώμα or as referring to Christ as dead and risen (Hellholm 1995:152). Whatever the case may be, it is unsatisfactory to interpret (like Badke 1988:29) the event of dying and rising with Christ as only a matter of 'allegiance' to Christ or of being 'connected to Christ'. The same applies to Dunn's (1982:262) contention that it is not the believer's mystical absorption into the deity that is at issue in Romans 6:1-11, but the experience of the power on the other side of the cross, a power of personal character. There is definitely more to be said about Paul's argument in this pericope than to interpret it as only referring to the benefit the believer receives from Christ's death and resurrection. This does not mean that we should rule out the idea that the believer benefits from Christ's death, but there must be more to it. Elsewhere Dunn has also conceded that it '...is hard to avoid the conclusion that in Paul the eic in the shorter phrase (=eic Χριστόν, GMMMP) was intended to bear a more pregnant sense than "with reference to":' the sense of movement into in order to become involved with or part of' (1988:311). And later he goes a little further by referring to Romans 6 as a feature '...of Paul's soteriology as specifically linked with his "Christ mysticism"' (1998:410-411).

The interpretation of the eic-formula in Romans 6:3 in a locative sense also finds support in 1 Corinthians 12:13 (see also Dunn 1988:311) where eic should, with most commentators, also be interpreted in a local sense, that is, as indicating the baptised person's incorporation into an already existing body. In view of the fact that it is the 'body of Christ' (verses 12, 27) that the believer is incorporated into, it can also be said that s/he is incorporated into Christ himself. This in turn suggests that the phrase Βαπτίζομαι eic Χριστόν refers to the act of becoming εν Χριστό. Sellin is therefore correct in saying: 'Die Taufe versetzt in den Christus-Raum..., das Sein "in Christus" ist also verstebar als ihr Ergebnis' (1996:14). This does not mean that Paul was of the opinion that the baptismal rite was to be seen as an ex opere operata act of incorporation (rightly so Betz 1979:187), an idea that Clemen (1924:163) apparently wants to avoid when he, apropos Galatians 3:27, paraphrases as follows: 'in der Taufe habt ihr euern Glauben an Christus bekannt, und dadurch seid ihr in ihm'. It is self-evident and needs no argument that for Paul there could have been no question of baptism without faith, as is clearly illustrated by Galatians 3:26-27. In verse 26 Paul stresses the fact that it is
through their faith in Christ Jesus that the readers became children of God, and that it was on the basis of this faith that they were baptised into Christ (verse 27; see again Betz 1995:107-108). Furthermore, although it is to be granted that the phrase βαπτίζεσθαι εἰς Χριστόν can be and actually was interpreted in different ways, even by Paul himself (Betz 1979:186), it does not alter the fact that baptism was regarded by Paul as an act of initiation and therefore as the occasion on which one becomes ἐν Χριστῷ. It would therefore be wrong to assume that he conceived baptism to be merely a symbolic act, just pointing to something that was already accomplished prior to or outside baptism itself. Consequently it would also be wrong to say that Paul did not assign to baptism some redemptive force or meaning. Schweitzer is therefore correct in stating about baptism ‘...daß dieses Sterben und Auferstehen in ihr seinen Anfang nimmt’. Furthermore he adds to this: ‘Von der ganzen Überlieferung von der Taufe hält Paulus das eine fest, daß sie die Erlösung wirkt’ (1930:254). What happens in baptism is only possible on the basis of the objective reality of the redemptive act of Christ, but it seems undeniable that Paul was of the opinion that it is through baptism that one comes to share in this redemption.

If the observations above are correct, and if one takes into account the purport of Paul’s rhetorical question in Romans 6:3, it is evident that he understood the act of becoming ἐν Χριστῷ, that is baptism, as the occasion of the believer’s dying and rising with Christ. I say this even while I am fully aware of the fact that there are quite a number of cases in which Paul gives expression to the notion of dying (and rising) or being crucified with Christ without reference to the baptismal rite (Rm 7:4; 2 Cor 5:14; Gl 2:19; 6:14,17; Phlp 3:10-11; cf 2 Cor 4:10-11; Gl 5:24; see Kennedy 1913:226; Betz 1979:187; Schmithals 1994:194; Cranfield 1994:41). In fact it is only in Romans 6 that he relates this notion to baptism. It is therefore quite probable that the notion of dying and rising with Christ was initially not linked to the practice of baptism. It is also true that Romans 6:1-11 wasn’t intended as an exposition of Paul’s baptismal theology but as a refutation of the accusation referred to in 6:1, namely that his teaching about God’s grace stimulated sin (Schmithals 1994:194). But, does all this mean that it was only by coincidence that this notion got linked to baptism in this pericope? And should we then say that Paul was not really of the opinion that baptism played a key role in letting the believer share in Christ’s death and resurrection? I definitely don’t think so, because I am convinced that what he is saying in this passage is the key to understanding the other passages, although the idea is comprehensively expressed in the other passages. This means that it was only on the basis of his conviction that it is through baptism that one is incorporated into Christ and thereby shares in his death and resurrection, that it was possible for Paul to say what he did in the other passages.
In maintaining that baptism is also the occasion of the rising of the believer, I am not ignoring the fact that in this pericope Paul constantly, three times in succession (verse 4: περιπατήσωμεν; 5: ἐσόμεθα; 8: ουξήσομεν), makes use of the future tense when speaking of the ‘rising’-part of the believer’s experience. Although time and space do not allow any meaningful discussion of this exegetical crux here, it is nonetheless quite significant that, as far as the new existence of the believer is concerned, Paul concludes his argument in verse 11 with the present participle ξωντας, and repeats it in verse 13 with the phrase ὡσει ἐκ νεκρῶν ξωντας. This points strongly in the direction of the new life as something not only of a futuristic nature but as already realised in some way or another. And this is obviously paralleled in 2 Corinthians 5:15 by οἱ ξωντες, which refers to the new life of the believers of which it was earlier said οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον (2 Cor 5:14). Cranfield is therefore correct in saying that the words ωσει ἐκ νεκρῶν ξωντας ‘...make it abundantly clear that Paul does think that the people he is addressing have already been raised from the dead in some sense’ (1994:41, my emphasis; see also Schweitzer 1930:13). I would not like to explain it by means of the well-known ‘already, not yet’ scheme, because in my view this presupposes a qualitative difference. I would rather like to see it in dialectic terms as a life which is at the same time a present as well as a future reality. Sellin may have some point in claiming that what we encounter in Romans 6 is a twofold eschatology. On the one hand life becomes a present reality at baptism. On the other, the resurrection of Christians remains something of the future (1983:230). However, Cranfield’s supposition that Paul made use of the future tenses to avoid a falsely realised eschatology and a sense of triumphalism, is another matter which I have no time to discuss further.

Naturally, to say that baptism is the occasion of the dying and rising with Christ does not at all imply that the new life as already realised, is not at the same time, and essentially so, also a life to be hoped for and to be realised in Christ at every future moment. At this point it is of importance to take note of the remarks made by Schweitzer. After pointing out that Paul’s mysticism is of an extraordinarily realistic nature, he adds: ‘Das sein in Christo wird nicht als ein ruhendes Teilhaben an dem geistigen Wesen Christi aufgefaßt, sondern als ein reales Miterleben seines Sterbens und Auferstehens’ (1930:13). If I understand Schweitzer correctly, this ‘reales Miterleben’ does not only concern the co-experiencing of the death but also of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, here and now. It can also be argued that for Paul the death and resurrection of Jesus belong together in such a way that they can be said to unite as the one saving event. From this it follows that to share in Christ’s death would automatically imply sharing in his life as well.

While there is little doubt among a number of scholars (see Penna 1996:259; Schmithals 1988:189) that the ἐν Χριστῷ formula gives expression
to a mystical union between Christ and the believer, it is questionable whether the same is to be assumed regarding the notion of dying and rising with Christ. The issue is how this 'with' is to be understood, namely whether it is to be taken as just expressing the idea that the believer dies and rises as Christ did or whether it is by becoming one with Christ that s/he dies and rises. Can an answer or some indication be found in the difficult phrase σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοίωματί τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ in Romans 6:5?

Newman and Nida (1973:114) point out that modern English translations supply 'with him', to be taken with the verb σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν. And as a result most of these translations understand 'have grown together' as a means of indicating unity with Christ, of becoming one with him. Yet, in offering possible equivalents for translating the notion of becoming one with Christ, Newman and Nida came up with a number of quite divergent proposals: 'identify ourselves with him', 'to join up with him', 'to share together with him', 'to become close companions with him', 'to become just as though we were one person with him' (1973:114). Clearly these proposals cannot semantically be placed in the same category, apart from the fact that it is to be doubted whether it is correct to supply 'with him' to the verb phrase. If Paul wanted to say that the believers had 'grown together' with 'Christ' he would have had many manners of speech at his disposal to say so, instead of having to do it this way. Apart from this, the fact of the matter is also that there is no αὐτῷ in the text, and no legitimate reason to supply it.

According to Betz (1995:115) there is now virtual consensus that the object of σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν is τῷ ὁμοίωματι and not something else (see also Wilckens 1980:13). While Betz then understands it as referring to baptism as a similitudo or symbol of Christ's death, there are others who strongly disagree. Dunn, for example, rejects this idea by claiming that '...the fusion is with the likeness of Christ's death, which is equivalent to fusion with Christ in his death..., but not to fusion with Christ by means of the likeness of his death' (1988:318; see also Frid 1986:197). However, even if it is to be conceded that verse 5 is not simply a repetition of verse 4 (Dunn 1988:318), it was undoubtedly meant to elaborate on what was said in verse 4. For this reason it is, in a certain sense, parallel to and a repetition of verse 4, correctly referred to by Louw (1979:75) as the epitome of verse 4. And if we keep in mind that in verse 4 it is in baptism through which the believer is buried with Christ and thus becomes conform to him in his death, one is tempted to assume that τῷ ὁμοίωματι in some way or another refers to baptism as the means through which the σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν took place. However, there is a twofold objection against taking τῷ ὁμοίωματι as referring to baptism as a likeness of Christ's death. Firstly, since the baptismal rite was in all probability an act of submersion, it would imply that Christ
met his death as a result of drowning. Secondly, it is argued that there is not a single piece of evidence that the early church conceived of the act of submergence and coming to the surface in the baptismal rite as a likeness of what happened to Christ (see among others Schlier 1979:195; Wilckens 1980:14). What remains as the most probable interpretation is to take ὁμοίωμα as referring to Christ’s death, but then as represented in the baptismal act. It is ‘...der im Vollzug der Taufe gegenwärtige Tod, also nicht der im Taufritus abgebildete, wohl aber im Taufvollzug präsente Tod’ (Schlier 1979:196; cf Käsemann 1974:158-159; Wilckens 1980:13-14). This interpretation is apparently supported by συμμορφώμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ in Philippians 3:10, which can hardly not be taken as parallel to σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοίωματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ. Yet, why did Paul not just say ‘have grown together with Christ’s death’, instead of making use of such an obscure expression? The most acceptable explanation for this seems to be that Paul knew that the death of Christ to which the believer conforms in the baptismal act cannot be his historical death which is exclusively his, but only his death as expiatory death. It is therefore indeed Christ’s death that the believer conforms to in baptism, and yet only its likeness as represented in the baptismal act. As Käsemann puts it: ‘ὁμοίωμα unterscheidet ebenso von dem Geschehen auf Golgotha, wie es damit verbindet’ (1974:159). However, after all this has been said and done, we are not much nearer to an answer to the question as to whether the notion of dying and rising with Christ is an expression of Pauline mysticism.

Is anything more at issue here than the idea of sharing with Christ his death and resurrection in the sense that one dies as he did, and is being raised to life as he was? Is it more than a ‘solidarity of destiny between creature and Lord’, as Penna (1996:256) puts it (see also Schweizer 1967:9)? It is easy to understand why many do not interpret Romans 6:1-11 in a mystical way, because it does not seem that to die as Christ did and being raised to life as he was, involves becoming mystically one with him. Those who claim that this is indeed the case are not at all clear about how it is to be conceived. Even Schweitzer is to be read closely if one wants to follow what he means by referring to the notion of dying and rising with Christ as Pauline mysticism. What becomes clear is that it is not in the first place the ‘Prozeß’, as he calls it, of dying and rising with Christ, that brings about the mystical union with Christ. The process of dying and rising is rather the practical expression, and therefore the result of the existing mystical union between Christ and the believer. ‘In der Vorstellung des andauernden Sterbens und Auferstehens mit Christo lebt sich der Realismus der Mystik Pauli aus’ (1930:17). Schweitzer’s point of departure is that the essence of Paul’s mysticism is to be found in his ἐν Χριστῷ concept: ‘Der Fundamentalgedanke der paulinischen Mystik
lautet: Ich bin in Christo...' (1930:3). 'Der Ausdruck "Sein in Christo" ist nur eine sprachliche Verkürzung für Teilhaben am mystischen Leibe Christi' (1930:123). It is out of this conviction of Paul that one has to understand his thoughts on baptism: 'Aus der Mystik des Seins in Christo, als dem Zentrum seiner Lehre, erklärt Paulus die Taufe' (1930:255). This means that it is on the basis of his mysticism that Paul regarded '... als Vorgang in der Taufe den Beginn des Seins in Christo und das damit gegebenen Sterbens- und Auferstehensprozesses' (1930:19, my emphasis). Thus, baptism is the means or occasion of the believers' becoming ἐν Χριστῷ, and being ἐν Χριστῷ has as its consequence the ongoing process of dying and rising with Christ. It is in this fellowship with Christ ‘...daß sie ...ein verborgenes Sterben und Auferstehen durchmachen, durch das sie neue, der Welt und ihrem eigenen natürlichen Wesen bereits entbogene und in die Seinsweise des Reiches Gottes versetzte Menschen werden’ (Schweitzer 1930:375-376). To sum up, it is not through dying and rising with Christ that one becomes ἐν Χριστῷ, and therefore mystically one with him; it is by becoming one with him through baptism that one's dying and rising with him becomes an ongoing process, and as such the expression of this mystical union.

Among what Schweitzer refers to as 'Sprüche paulinischer Mystik' (1930:3-4) one finds, as could be expected, Galatians 2:19-20; 3:26-28 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. The fact that these passages strongly support Schweitzer's views, is not to be denied. In all of them we find language which in one form or another gives expression to the motif of either participating in Christ or partaking in his death and its benefits. In the first and the last of these, the notion of Christ as living in the believer (Gl 2:20) or the believer as a new being ἐν Χριστῷ (2 Cor 5:17) is closely linked to the idea of the believer's dying with Christ (ἀνεκτῷ ῥώμῃ, Gl 2:19; πάντες ἀπέθανον, 2 Cor 5:14). In the case of the second, the notion of having put on Christ (Χριστόν ἐνεκτῷ) is again closely linked to the act of baptism into Christ. All this suggests that what is expressed in these texts parallels the essence of Paul's argument in Romans 6:1-11. And since there can be no doubt that at least the phrase ξῶ δὲ οὐκετί ἐγὼ, ξῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός (Gl 2:20), like its converse ἐγὼ ἐν Χριστῷ, should be taken as a 'mystical' expression (rightly so Betz 1979:124; Longenecker 1990:92), it follows that it would not be farfetched to assume that Paul indeed conceived of the idea of dying and rising with Christ in 'mystical' terms. This would mean that he, especially in the light of Galatians 2:20, was of the opinion that by being incorporated into Christ through baptism one not only dies but becomes a new being in Christ, in that Christ now lives in one. It is on the basis of this that Schweitzer states: 'In die Leiblichkeit Christi eingepflanzt, verliert er (der Getaufte, GMMP) sein kreatürliches Eigendasein und seine natürliche Persönlichkeit. Hinfort
ist er nur noch eine Erscheinungsform der in jener Leiblichkeit dominierenden Persönlichkeit Jesu Christi‘ (1930:125).

These words of Schweitzer come very close to a negation of the personality of the believer (cf Longenecker 1990:92–93). That this is not the case, is evident from Galatians 2:20b (cf Phlp 3:9–11) where it is explicitly stated that the new existence of Christ living in me, is a life lived by faith in Christ (ἐν πίστει). The believers are therefore not absorbed by Christ or fused with him, thereby losing their identity or personality. Because Paul’s ‘mysticism’ is based on faith and experienced through faith it can be called faith-mysticism, ‘Glaubensmystik’ as Rohde (1984:96) calls it. That the believer does not mystically disappear in some sublime realm is also emphasised by the phrase τῷ ἐν σαρκὶ (Gl 2:20b) which reminds one that the new life is lived in the concreteness of everyday life.

Furthermore, one also has to question Schweitzer’s concept of the dying and rising of the believer as a continuous process. There is of course no problem in conceiving of the new life or existence in Christ as a continuous experience, but the same cannot be said of the believer’s death, as expressed by Paul in the relevant passages. As we all know, in each of these cases, whether ἀποθνῄσκω or σταυρόω is used, the tense of the verb is aorist, with the exception of a few perfects. This leaves no doubt that Paul conceived of dying with Christ as a once for all event of the past not to be repeated in the future, or as a factual situation that cannot be reversed. It seems that it is precisely on the basis of this fact that Paul can speak of the Christian as a new being in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gl 6:15). That Schweitzer is fully aware of this is clear from statements like: ‘In allem sind sie (die Erwählten, GMMP) wie solche, die mit Christo begraben wurden und nun bereits im neuen Dasein existieren (Röm. 6,4–5). Dem Wesen dieser neuen Seinsweise nach sind sie Tote, die zu Lebendigen geworden sind (Röm 6,13; 1930:120). How statements like these are to be reconciled with the concept of a continuous dying with Christ is not clear. Perhaps what Schweitzer had in mind was that the believer, in a certain sense still in and part of this world, has to die to the world and to sin on a continuous basis.

**4 CONCLUSION**

As far as the possible background to the issue addressed in our question is concerned, I am not going to repeat the remarks that have already been made in this regard. I must, however, point out that the question as to whether the New Testament was influenced by the mystery cults or to be more precise the initiations into these cults, has been and still is an issue that crops up time and again. Regardless of what has been said about generalisations and mis-representations of what really happened in these cults, as well as the
improbability that the New Testament was influenced by them in a significant way, it seems that we cannot rule out any such influence. It remains a fact that no community or movement ever escapes influence from many different sectors of its environment. I therefore agree with Dunn when he says that, in the context of the times, those familiar with both Christianity and one or more of the mystery cults would be bound to understand the rite and language of Christian initiation as equivalent to that of the mysteries without thereby identifying the two, or calling into question the distinctive claims of each (1988:310-311). Thus the idea of entering into a very close and special relationship or bond with the deity in mystery initiation must have been known to Paul, and could therefore have been determinative in forming his ideas about the role and function of baptism. Naturally this does not exclude influence from the Old Testament or Judaism, but in this case the mystery cults look like the most probable candidate.

Looking at Paul himself, there are in the first place those instances where he speaks about dying and rising with Christ without linking them to baptism at all. I believe that the reason for this is that these instances were meant to give expression to the vicarious aspect of Christ’s death (ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν) and its redemptive significance (ἀφεὶς οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον, 2 Cor 5:14). However, I cannot believe that Paul could have conceived of the believer’s sharing in the experience of dying and rising with Christ without the believer being incorporated into Christ, and therefore becoming one with Christ. There is no indication that Paul thought of this incorporation as taking place in any other manner than through baptism into Christ, which is at the same time the believer’s initiation into the church. It further seems that this incorporation is something more than the believer’s transition to Christ’s ownership or domain, or entering into a special relationship with Christ. It is rather the coming about of a totally new form of existence, an existence of being fully controlled by Christ, of living through Christ living in the believer. It is the coming about of a new personality in which Christ can be identified, yet without the believer losing her/his identity. It is a union between Christ and the believer, established by Christ and experienced through faith in him, that can probably be best described as ‘mystical’. And because this union results in the believer’s dying and rising with Christ, and not the other way around, these formulas can only be regarded as expressions of Pauline ‘mysticism’ in a secondary sense. This means that they do not refer to a mystical sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection, but to a dying and rising as he did, as a result of being ‘mysteriously’ one with him.
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Professor G M M Pelser, Department of New Testament (A), University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002 South Africa.