1. Unbaptized members in the Church of Sweden - an introduction

When a few decades ago the Church of Sweden started to pay attention to the rising number of non-baptized members, this was not a completely new phenomenon. From the middle of the 19th century, Baptists refused to baptize their children in the state church. Having instituted judicial proceedings against the objectors, the Swedish authorities finally accepted the idea of non-baptized members of the Church of Sweden.¹ The legal opportunities to leave the state church that had already been opened in the 19th century were seldom used, and most Baptists remained members even after the principle of religious freedom was enacted in 1951. Even though many children of Baptists were never baptized as adults, the overwhelming majority of non-baptized members of the Church of Sweden were the result of secularization and religious indifference.² Rapidly falling baptism and confirmation rates, especially in larger cities, created an increasing number of non-baptized members of the state church.³

² However, religious factors have proved to be more significant than socio-economical factors, when it comes to explaining the break-down of religious customs related to the Church of Sweden. At least this is the case with the first phase of the process. Consequently, Free-Church revivalism seriously affected both service attendance and frequency of communion and baptism. Carl-Henrik Martling, Nattvardskrisen i Karlstads stift under 1800-talets senare hälft. Lund 1958. Carl-Henrik Martling, Kyrkosed och sekularisering. Stockholm 1965. Karl-Gunnar Grape, Kyrkliga förhållanden i Lappland efter sekelskiftet i belysning av dop- och nattvardssedens utveckling. Stockholm 1965. Karl-Gunnar Grape, Dopseden i Lappland under 1900-talets första hälft. (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae 36.) Uppsala 1980. Anders Bäckström, ”Nattvardssedens förändring underr 1800-talet som uttryck för den religiösa och sociala omväljningen.” In: Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift 1984, pp. 141-155. The geographical variation of religious customs has been used to differentiate between certain church regions. Irrespective of the method applied, the differences between regions to a great extent reflect variations in the character of revivalism. When revivalism remained in the state church, religious customs were strengthened. A short presentation of earlier research into Swedish church geography can be found in Jan Carlsson, Region och religion. En regionindelning utifrån den kyrkliga sedens styrka på 1970-talet. (Bibliotheca Historicico-Ecclesiastica Lundensis 23.) Lund 1990, pp. 9-12.
Approaching the day when the bonds with the state would be cut, the Church of Sweden had to develop principles concerning baptism and membership. The outcome of this attempt to define the boundaries of the Church of Sweden as a free Lutheran church, was a clear statement on baptism as the foundation of membership.\(^4\)

However, in the 18th century the Church of Sweden had already had to face the problem of unbaptized members. In the American Middle Colonies the descendants of the settlers of the New Sweden colony formed a Swedish Lutheran community of 1,500 souls distributed over three congregations. In this paper I will analyze the pattern of baptism in the Swedish Lutheran congregations in colonial America. First, the structure of baptismal customs will be elicited. Special attention will be paid to problems concerning late baptisms, emergency baptisms and sponsors. Second, the pattern of baptism will be discussed to present some tentative conclusions on the meaning of baptism in an early modern setting of religious freedom and diversity. What can baptismal patterns reveal about the function of the Swedish Lutheran congregations? Did the congregations work as ethnic or religious communities?

2. Swedish Church regulations in Colonial America

Before turning to the analysis of the pattern of baptism, I will demonstrate how the Swedish ministers tried to transplant the Swedish Church Law of 1686 to American soil. When the Swedish mission was re-opened in 1697, the ministers were instructed to maintain the Swedish Church Law. The church records bear strong witness to the ministers’ attempts to establish a stable church order. For instance, the catechetical instruction was organized in the same way as in Sweden with recurrent examinations in the homes and in church. Having returned to Sweden, Andreas Hesselius in 1725 reported on the conditions among the Swedes in America, stating that church discipline was executed in accordance with the Swedish Church Law, which was better known than English civil laws.\(^5\) The deputy-governor William Markham had already granted the Swedish congregations free disposition of church discipline in 1697.\(^6\) At a meeting of the Christina congregation in Wilmington, Delaware, on May 30, 1713, Pastor Eric

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\(^5\) Andreas Hesselius, *Kort Berettelse Om Then Svenska Kyrkios närvarande Tilstånd i America Samt oförgripelige tankar om thess widare förkofring.* Norrköping 1725, p. 12.

\(^6\) The governor had granted the Swedish congregations free disposition of church discipline. Letter from Andreas Rudman to Jacob Arrhenius, dated on October 29, 1697. *AJP,* 58:5, p. 90.
Biörck and the newly arrived replacements, Andreas Hesselius and Abraham Lidenius, called for

a strict attention to the system of church discipline which his Royal Majesty’s Highness of Sweden promulgated, and which he presented to this church which was adopted by it and approved by them, but owing to the situation of the country and its circumstances as to government and secular affairs, should be applied only to religious and spiritual matters.7

Reading their clerical oaths to the congregation, the ministers maintained that they could "not deviate under any pretext from this good order and regulation," meaning that they would "hold the congregation itself and its members to a good and proper church discipline".8 At the meeting the congregation agreed to several articles referring to the church law. Regarding baptism, the ministers managed to persuade the church members to "present children at an early age for baptism".9 In order to maintain discipline in accordance with the agreed articles, a church council of twelve men was elected "to decide all matters connected with our Christian community".10

However, after Eric Biörck’s return to Sweden, ”a self-willed freedom and neglect of a common interest” motivated a new meeting on August 28, 1714, when the congregation was "warned and exhorted". Aside from the Bible, there was no better means to use to achieve the needed improvement in the state of affairs than "the published Church Laws of His Swedish Majesty".11 The parental duty of bringing the children to baptism was inculcated into the church members:

That parents should be careful to have their children brought early to baptism, and not as often happens, let their babes remain at home a whole or many months, yes, even a half year, notwithstanding they live so near the church or Priest’s house, that they have no excuse, and also in good time to give in the names of sponsors to the Priest that he may judge of their fitness.12

At a new parish meeting on July 9, 1715, the members of the church council were admonished to urge the still non-baptized adults to receive the holy sacrament. The pastor

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7 *The Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, Del., from 1697 to 1773*. Translated from the Original Swedish by Horace Burr. (Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware, IX.) Wilmington 1890, p. 177.
8 According to the oath in the Church Law of 1686, chapter 22, § 2, the ministers were obliged to "keep a good and proper church discipline in accordance with the published Church Law of His Royal Majesty". *Kyrko-Lagen af 1686*, p. 469.
10 *The Records of Holy Trinity*, p. 179.
emphasized their Christian duty to "labor for the salvation of them whom they receive into their houses".  

After this exhortation other matters than baptismal neglect attract the attention at the meetings of the Christina congregation. However, in 1742 Pastor Petrus Tranberg touched upon the subject at a parish meeting, where he "complained of the neglect of some members of the congregation to report the age of the children at the baptisms". More than indicating a change of baptismal custom, the admonition reflects the commitment of the newly arrived pastor. Even Tranberg’s successor, Dean Israel Acrelius, found reason to reform Swedish-American church life, to make it comply with Swedish church regulations. Having accounted for his inaugural sermon in the church book, Acrelius gives a full report on the current stand of his congregation:

There are many persons thirty, forty or more years old, who have never been to the communion. Baptisms have been deferred till the children were six, seven and eight weeks old, especially when the mother was sick, as the custom has been largely introduced for the parents to stand as sponsors for their children. [---] Nobody seemed to care to announce their children for baptism, that their name, age and witnesses might be recorded.

In comparison with Hesselius’ judgement 35 years earlier, months of delay had been reduced to weeks in Acrelius’ assessment. However, the ministerial complaint was not intended just for the record. At a parish meeting on December 27, 1749, the church members "were admonished not to delay the baptism of their children over eight days". In certain cases, though, exceptions from the rule were allowed. But neither cold winter weather, nor long distances to church should delay the baptism more than two weeks, "otherwise a great responsibility will lie on the parents if their children should die unbaptized", the pastor warned his congregation.

Not only the baptismal customs, but also the parishioners’ communion frequency were a major ministerial concern at the beginning of the 18th century. When the members of the Christina congregation were exhorted to present their infants at the font at an early age, they were also urged to go to communion more often. At the meeting of May 30, 1713, the congregation agreed to celebrate the Lord’s Supper frequently. And on August 28, 1714, the ministers stressed how important it was to "be faithful and constant in partaking of the Lord’s Supper, and not excuse themselves therefrom by insufficient reasons as is the custom of some, and even the great part of those who hold themselves to be prominent members of the church."
When the information in the communion records is processed, it becomes evident that the ministerial efforts to increase the frequency were successful. From 1713 the number of individual communions rose rapidly to a very high level in the 1720s, after which a period of equally rapid decline started (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Communion frequency in the Christina Congregation, Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, DE, 1713-1756

Of course, the number of communions was a result of ministerial zeal manifested not only in exhortations, but also in an increasing number of celebrations, i.e. masses in church.20 But there might also have been a rising interest among the parishioners in


20 Daniel Lindmark, "Swedish Lutherans Encountering Religious Diversity in Colonial America: From Swedish Mission Studies to American Religious History.” In: Daniel Lindmark (ed.), Swedishness Reconsidered: Three Centuries of Swedish-American Identities. (Kulturens frontlinjer 18.) Umeå 1999, p. 26, Diagram 2. In this essay on Swedes in a multi-religious setting, I discuss the decline of communion and celebration frequency as a result of the pastor’s intense engagement in the Anglican church. There is also reason to consider changing conceptions of communion as a factor. When discussing Holy Communion in the German Lutheran synodal meeting in 1760, the following was noted: "The Swedish members formerly had excessively legalistic ideas, and some shrank from it until their old age or upon their death beds; but now that they have been better informed, they come weeping and praying and ask for it.” Documentary History of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States. Proceedings of the Annual Conventions from 1748 to 1821. Philadelphia 1898, p. 55. In a diary entry for October 28, 1761, Anders Borell comments on the first communion of an 18-year-old. According to Borell, communion at such a young age was a rare thing, as people usu-
participating in such church services as communion. From the perspective of popular demand for services provided by the Swedish Lutheran Church, the first decades of the 18th century could be characterized as a period of ethnic revival or ethnic mobilization. Under pressure from Quakers and with their land holdings persistently questioned by newly arrived Europeans, the American Swedes chose to reconnect to their fatherland requesting assistance in the form of Swedish ministers and books. If the establishment of a Swedish Lutheran church life expressed the colonists’ need to manifest their Swedishness in their defense of old rights, the rising frequency of communion could be interpreted as an act of confession, namely a confession of Swedishness. Irrespective of what perspective is applied – either ministerial zeal or ethnic revival – to explain the rising levels of church commitment, there is reason to assume that the baptismal pattern undergoes a similar change as communion did in the period after 1713.

3. Emergency baptisms

Emergency baptism in Swedish law and practice

According to the Swedish Church Law of 1686, any baptized Christian could perform an emergency baptism. In order to make sure that lay baptisms were carried out properly, the Church Law stated that midwives should be instructed in how to perform emergency baptism. In an age when religion was universal and infant mortality high, emergency baptism became a common way of leaving the life of the newborn in the hands of the Almighty. The custom was not only resorted to in an emergency such as immediate mortal danger, but became the normal way of christening infants in areas distant from the church. In remote areas the emergency baptism was the only way to christen the newborn in a reasonable time. The Church Law required baptism within eight days, and in many parishes huge distances, poor communications, and a harsh climate made ordinary, ministerial baptism in church impossible. This was the case in most parishes in Northern Sweden and especially in Lapland, where emergency baptism constituted the prevailing pattern up to the 20th century. For instance in the Saami school, pupils were instructed how to administer emergency baptism, and itinerant teachers and lay readers at the village worship were especially engaged as officiants. Even though an emergency baptism was considered a full baptism, the Church Law required an act of confirmation by a clergyman to complete the christening.

ally believed that nobody could be truly prepared before the age of 30. AJP 60:5. However, in the current essay I am more interested in the early period of rapidly rising communion participation.

21 Daniel Lindmark, "Mobilizing Swedes: External Pressure and the Formation of Swedishness in Colonial America, 1682-1764." (Forthcoming.)


In the 19th century when the revivalist "reading movement" in Northern Sweden opposed the Church Agenda of 1811, where some of the old rites had been excluded from the order of baptism, the emergency baptism became an act of protest and restoration of old order. Finding the meaning of baptism having been changed from a covenant of grace to a covenant of law, the evangelical "readers" resorted to the custom of emergency baptism in accordance with the older service manual. In many cases these "readers" even objected to clerical confirmation of the act.

Considering the strong tradition of emergency baptisms committed by lay persons in Sweden, one would also expect to find the custom among American Swedes. There are many reasons for this assumption. Firstly, the Swedish Church Law should have been followed in the Swedish Lutheran congregations in America. Secondly, the American Swedes were scattered over huge areas, and most of them lived a considerable distance from the church. Thirdly, other adjustments were made to the special circumstances under which the American Swedes lived. Instead of stationary schooling, the Swedes had to resort to ambulatory schooling and household instruction; and on saints’ days the Swedes were allowed to perform household devotions instead of worshipping in church. Apart from frequent emergency baptism, the village religious service conducted by lay persons formed the most conspicuous pattern of Northern Sweden church life.

**Emergency baptisms in the Swedish congregations in colonial America**

As was demonstrated above, the clerical concern about baptism very clearly focused on the necessity of the infants’ early presentation at the font. However, the records do not provide more than incidental evidence of emergency baptisms. In 1714 the baptismal record of the Christina congregation has the following entry:

Samuel Hals and Anna Elizabeth’s child George, born 2 weeks before Christmas, baptized April 17th after having been previously baptized from necessity by his mother. Sponsors, Carl Springer and his wife Maria, Miss Judith Van de Ver.

The entry reveals that the emergency baptism was not approved of by the pastor. According to the Church Law, a lay baptism should not be repeated, unless it had been performed improperly. In 1716 another emergency baptism occurs in the register, this

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27 *Kyrko-Lagen af 1686*, Ch. 4, § 3.
time without any comments either of disapproval or confirmation. In 1719, "Olof Pålsson and wife Elizabeth’s child Peter, born June 30th, [was] baptized from necessity June 29th". Next time an emergency baptism is recorded is in 1724, when a six-month-old is registered as having received a "necessary baptism". Emergency baptisms are also rare occurrences in the records of Raccoon and Penns Neck. However, on February 2, 1718, "was baptised, or confirmed, Charles and Elsa Dahlbo’s Maria, baptised in emergency". Even when there was an emergency situation, no lay baptism was performed, instead, the pastor was called for. Nils Collin reports on a case when he was urged to go quickly to the house of Robert Brown to baptize his son David. But even after this incident there were still four children who had not been baptized.

Even though the arguments I presented initially in favor of the probability of the custom of emergency baptisms being widespread in Swedish America might have appeared convincing, my assumptions proved wrong when the baptismal records were examined. Consequently, I have to explain why there were so few emergency baptisms among Swedes in colonial America. First, the clergymen recruited for service in America might not have been familiar with the prevailing custom in Northern Sweden and especially Lapland. They had grown up in other parts of the country and arrived in America with quite different experiences. Second, there is also a possibility that the ministers used the baptisms as a source of income. Being poorly provided for by their congregations, the Swedish ministers used to preach in the Anglican churches. In 1721 the Anglican mission society SPG decided to pay the Swedish ministers 10 pounds yearly, provided they preached 20 times a year in the Anglican churches. But the Swedish ministers also tried to get paid for performing special services. At a meeting of the Christina congregation on August 28, 1714, the ministers raised the question of some kind of payment for extraordinary services:

It was also said to the assembly that when on special occasions the services of the Priests were required, such as publishing bans, betrothals, marriages, burying the dead, and such like extraordinary service, they should not be so ungrateful as to burden them, without any return for their labour.

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28 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 233. In 1719, there is a baptism recorded which took place "immediately after birth". However, it is unclear whether this was a lay baptism. The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 253. A similar case occurs in 1741. The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 377.
29 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 252. As the next entry accounts for a baptism performed the same day, the date July 19th might refer to the day of clerical confirmation of an early emergency baptism.
32 Letter from The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) to Dean Andreas Hesselius, dated in London, May 8, 1721. The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 264. Daniel Lindmark, "Swedish Lutherans". Probably the cooperation with the Anglicans made the Swedish ministers less inclined to encourage emergency baptisms, as lay baptism was not accepted in the Anglican Church. See below.
33 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 198.
Even though baptisms are not mentioned in the list of extraordinary services, the call for the pastor to baptize a child in the home should have resulted in some kind of revenue. As long as baptisms were performed in church in connection with religious worship, they might not have been considered extraordinary services.

Third, the ministers were instructed to establish Swedish church order, which was obviously interpreted as securing the authority of the church and the ministry. By permitting church members to handle baptism, the clergy would have jeopardized their own authority. Linked to such considerations could have been a wish to uphold the distinction between a true Lutheran church and the many sects in colonial America. By reserving the sacraments as exclusively clerical services, the Swedish ministers marked their difference from the sects where no ministry existed. The almost total absence of lay baptisms might also indicate that people preferred to adjust to a common American pattern, where baptism was a ministerial prerogative. The sheer existence of a Swedish ministry contributed to the status of the Swedish community, which is why there is reason to believe that Swedish parents found it more prestigious to have their children baptized by the minister. According to Israel Acrelius, the main reason for the regrettable neglect of emergency baptisms in the Swedish congregations was that neither the Anglicans, nor the Presbyterians accepted lay baptisms. Any parent who baptized his child would run the risk of earning a bad reputation. Another explanation is deriving from the parents’ point of view. Having been influenced by the specific conditions in the colony of religious freedom, the parents might not have found baptism totally necessary. When Quakers and Baptists reckoned themselves as Christians without practicing infant baptism, the Lutheran custom might have declined. Such an interpretation would be supported if it was found that most children were baptized at a considerably later age than was required in the Church Law of 1686.

4. The institution of sponsorship

The Church Law of 1686 stated clearly that only adult and well instructed Lutherans could be sponsors. Vicious and licentious people were explicitly forbidden to act as sponsors. Implementing the ecclesiastical regulations concerning the sacraments in the Swedish-American congregations in 1713, the ministers also expressed their wish to have sponsorship regulated in accordance with the Swedish Church Law stating: "what ought to be the qualification of those who are asked to serve in that capacity, and that they should be previously made known to the pastors". In Raccoon congregation the sponsorship issue was discussed at a parish meeting in April 1719. The pastor then asked "whether the congregation did not think it necessary that the age of the children who were baptized, and the names of their god-parents should be presented [to the pastor] on the morning of the christening, so that the pastor could then put down the

36 Kyrko-Lagen af 1686, Ch. 3, § 5.
37 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 178.
children’s age, and disapprove of those god-parents who were not suitable for assuming responsibility for the children’s baptism”.38 The congregation agreed to present the age and names in due time, but refused to have their sponsors reviewed by the pastor, as "it was impossible for them to get such [godparents] as were found competent in all respects, because the congregation was small, and only the smallest part thereof was rightly concerned about what appertained to their salvation”.39 In this case the clerical complaint was not aimed at parents neglecting to present their infants at the font in due time, but rather at the careless use of sponsors. Even though the quotation implies that the godparents might be disqualified by their inappropriate moral standard or religious zeal, there is reason to believe that the clerical interest in the sponsorship was also motivated by confessional concern. In a multi-confessional context, the choice of sponsors could have been considered vital in keeping the Lutheran doctrine alive in the Swedish congregations.

In the extant baptismal records, the sponsors’ names are carefully noted. The vast majority of the baptized individuals have four godparents, usually two of each gender, thereby adapting to a general Swedish custom.40 From the middle of the 1720s, it was an ever more frequent pattern to have two sponsors. The next stage in the decline of the institution of sponsorship was marked by the systematic use of parents as sponsors. Although occurring sporadically in entries of the baptismal records from 1718, parental sponsorship did not come to form a distinctive pattern until the 1740s.41 The Raccoon baptismal record of 1741 ends with a listing of the baptisms that had been performed with no other witnesses than the parents. For 6 of the 14 baptisms the record says "Surities Parents themselves for want of others".42 In the incomplete re-cords for the 1740s and 1750s godparents appear in some cases, while in other cases parents are noted as witnesses. From 1762 the predominant pattern is that the parents are the only witnesses to the baptism of their child.43 Only occasionally are other sponsors noted in the records.

How should the decline of the institution of sponsorship be interpreted? First, compliance with the Church Law regulations in the period after 1713 should be emphasized. As long as membership was ethnically based and membership in the Swedish Lutheran congregations consequently signalled a wish to belong to the Swedish community,

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40 In the printed translation of the church records of Christina congregation, the names of the sponsors are omitted in the lists of baptisms after 1715. The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 194. The following discussion is based on the records of Raccoon and Penns Neck.
41 The Records of […] Raccoon and Penns Neck, pp. 241, 244, 246, etc. There are also baptisms recorded without any godparents registered.
42 The Records of […] Raccoon and Penns Neck, p. 266.
43 Uppsala Consistory nevertheless urged the ministers to restore the old sponsorship custom. Only members of the Swedish congregations should be accepted as witnesses, and no parents should be sponsors for their own children. Letter from Uppsala Consistory to Dean Carl Magnus Wrangel, October 13, 1762. AUC FVIII:11, 63.
sponsorship functioned as a tool for tightening the bonds between the members of the community.\textsuperscript{44}

Second, the decline of the institution of sponsorship indicates that the maintenance of Swedishness no longer had the same priority. Thus, the general trend towards under-communication of Swedishness from the middle of the century is evidenced in the decreasing frequency of sponsors. Of course, this development coincides not only with the shift from ethnic to religious membership, but also with the transition from collectivism to individualism in religious worship.\textsuperscript{45}

When Israel Acrelius in 1759 comments on the decline of sponsorship, he draws the conclusion that parents had adjusted to the Presbyterian custom. Common arguments for refusing sponsorship was that sponsors never kept what they promised, and that orphans never were taken care of by their sponsors, but were placed in families by the magistrates with no respect to the parents’ religion.\textsuperscript{46}

5. Baptisms in Christina congregation, 1713-1749

Having discussed church regulations, emergency baptisms and sponsorship using primarily qualitative methods and materials, the information in the baptismal registers of the Christina congregation will be processed quantitatively. Hence, \textit{Diagram 2} shows the number of baptisms in this congregation from 1713 to 1749. The number of baptisms increased from 1713 and reached its peak in the 1720s, the following years form a long period of steady decline. This pattern closely follows the evolution of communion frequency (\textit{Diagram 1}). There is reason to believe that the same explanations apply to both sacraments. Therefore, one might assume that the major trends in \textit{Diagram 2} could be explained by changes in church commitment, as was the case with communion frequency: just as members chose not to take communion, they could avoid baptizing their children. However, baptismal frequency should be more closely connected to age distribution and nativity rates. The increase and decline in the number of children baptized might simply reflect changing birth rates. This factor, in turn, could be dependent on changes in congregational membership. Unfortunately, there are no records extant on which to base membership assessments. Consequently, the long period of declining numbers of baptisms gives the impression of an aging congregation, where church commitment is also declining.

There is, however, one structural explanation behind the rapid growth of the number of baptisms that should be taken into account here. The pastor of the Christina congregation used to serve some of the Anglican churches in the area, especially from 1721 on-

\textsuperscript{44} Lindmark, "Mobilizing Swedes". The argument is developed somewhat further in section 7 below.\textsuperscript{45} This shift is analyzed with regard to changing educational philosophies in Daniel Lindmark, "Swedish Schooling in Colonial America." In: Daniel Lindmark (ed.), \textit{Education and Colonialism. Swedish schooling projects in colonial areas, 1638-1878}. (Kulturens frontlinjer 29.) Umeå 2000.\textsuperscript{46} Acrelius, \textit{Beskrifning}, pp. 407-408.
wards, when the SPG offered 10 pounds a year to the Swedish ministers if they preached "in the several vacant churches in Pennsylvania, at least twenty times in one year". 47 Some of the baptisms performed in the Anglican churches were recorded in the baptismal register of the Christina congregation. That is expressly the case for the years 1721-23, when the headings in the baptismal records indicate the inclusion of the Anglican churches of St. James and Apoquinimy. At least for those years, the baptismal registers serve more as records of the pastor’s ministerial service, than as congregational lists of new members accepted through baptism.

Diagram 2. Number of baptisms per year in the Christina congregation, 1713-1749

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Source: Baptismal registers. The Records of Holy Trinity Church.

In order to examine in more detail the meaning of baptism in the Christina congregation, I have calculated the age of the individuals presented at the font. To what extent was the Church Law regulation implemented in Swedish America? Diagram 3 clearly demonstrates that only about 40 percent of the entries in the baptismal records complied with the Church Law. That is to say that the majority of the individuals who were baptized by the pastors of the Christina congregation were older than 8 days. In fact, more than 30 percent were older than one month. There was even a substantial number aged one year or more.

Obviously, the Swedish ministers failed in their efforts to promote Swedish Lutheran church order. However, Diagram 3 tells more about the function of the Christina congregation. First, the period from 1713 to 1727 provides evidence of ministerial at-

47 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 264.
tempts to implement the Church Law. If infant baptism is defined as baptism within one month, the rise in infant baptism proceeded for ten more years. From 1713 to 1737, the percentage of baptisms within one month after birth increased from 57 to 80. Consequently, there is a longterm development in the direction taken by infant baptism, at least when viewed in a wider sense.

Parental neglect could explain the baptisms that appear in the timespan between 31 and 360 days after birth. In support of this assumption, I would like to quote an entry from the baptismal register of the Christina congregation for 1716: “Johannes de Foss and wife Hannah’s child Anne, baptized November 25th, 10 months old, and only through the neglect of parents and contempt of all advice without the least excuse has been kept from baptism unto this day.”48 Applied to Diagram 3, this interpretation means that parents became more concerned about their infants’ baptism in the 15-year period from 1713. After 1727, however, parental neglect formed a more usual pattern. This interpretation corresponds to the development of communion frequency in the same congregation. With regard to baptismal and communion patterns, church commitment was declining in Holy Trinity Church from the late 1720s onwards.


Source: Baptismal registers. The Records of Holy Trinity Church. Note: Only baptisms for children whose age is indicated are included in the diagram.

But how can the decreasing percentage of one-year-olds and older people in the baptismal registers be explained? To be sure, in some cases this development reflects a successful campaign against parental neglect, but in most cases the oldest cohort represents missionary efforts directed towards Native and African Americans as well as Quakers. From this perspective, the high rate of people older than one year of age

48 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 233.
when they were baptized, emphasizes the character of Holy Trinity Church as an active and attractive congregation in the first 15 years of investigation.

6. Major reasons behind late baptisms

Aside from parental neglect, several other causes lie behind the late baptisms in the Swedish congregations of colonial America. In the following I will discuss successful mission and "responsible Protestantism" as factors behind the late baptisms. On many occasions these factors are indicated in the baptismal registers. In many other cases, it is difficult to distinguish these and other factors from pure parental neglect. For instance, in 1713 two daughters of John Pålsson, Rebecca and Maria, were baptized, the latter being 12 years old.49 There is no indication of conversion from Quakerism in the record, and the names alone provide sufficient evidence of Swedishness. But there is still no conclusive evidence of either conversion or parental neglect. In the latter case, evidence is seldom more than circumstantial.50 Only on exceptional occasions are there remarks in the registers revealing parental neglect.51

Missionary efforts

In the Christina congregation some missionary efforts can be detected in the baptismal records. On June 16, 1717, a baptism took place of "The Quaker Oliver Matthews and wife Elizabeth’s son William, 20 years old."52 And on July 10, 1720, Dean Andreas Hesselius in the Anglican church at Stanton baptized the Quaker son Jonathan at the age of 21.53 In 1718 the first Quaker baptisms were recorded in the Swedish congregations of New Jersey. Thomas Chieu and his sister Elizabeth, both brought up as Quakers, were baptized in Raccoon on October 29.54 Two years later "a servant, James Price, about 27 years old” was baptized in Penns Neck, probably having had a Quaker upbringing.

Quaker converts are found in the Gloria Dei church records as well. In his extracts from the church book of the Wicaco congregation in Philadelphia, Pastor Pehr Kalm

50 Nils Collin relates a comic episode that took place in the beginning of his long ministerial service in America. When asked to baptize three children 3-4 years of age after a sermon i Raccoon, Collin saw the children run away when he was about to pour water on their heads. The screaming fugitives were captured in the field and brought back with some trouble. The accident is presented as an example of the state of religion in America. Nils Collin’s Diary. *AUC* FVIII:9, 81.
51 "On February 10 was baptised Anders Hindersson’s child, Anders, without godparents, brought in by a little girl,” and on June 2, the baptism of Pål Wansson’s daughter Christina was recorded without sponsors, but with the additional comment: "The parents do not go to Church." *The Records of [...] Raccoon and Penns Neck*, p. 247.
has noted the numbers of Swedish children in the baptismal records. 55 There is no information concerning the age of the baptized, with three exceptions. On April 30, 1721, a Quaker girl called Gen. Warner was baptized having learned to read Swedish and mastered the catechism. By the time of her baptism she was 22 years old. A similar case occurred four years later, when Mrs. Elisabeth Star was baptised, 21 years of age. Up till then she had "clung to the harmful Quakerism". Also in 1727 two former Quakers were baptized, their ages are not indicated in the extract.

Quaker conversions to the Lutheran faith took place throughout the period of the Swedish mission. During Carl Magnus Wrangel’s pastorate in Wicaco, several Quakers were baptized. On July 29, 1761, the leader of the German Lutherans, Henry Melchior Mühlenberg, accompanied Wrangel to the island of Tinnicum, where the first Swedish settlement had been established. They visited a former Quaker, John Tailor, who had been instructed and baptized by Wrangel. 56 Later the same year, Mühlenberg was asked by a Swedish synod about his opinion on the language question. In his answer he referred to Wrangel’s successful use of the English language:

Old, faithful Swedes assured me that as a result of the tireless calling by the honorable provost in the homes of the people, and by his descending instruction in the Swedish and English languages, more than twenty adult persons had already been brought to holy baptism. They had been entirely ignorant and spiritually dead before. 57

At a joint Lutheran synod in June 1762, German and Swedish ministers reported on their congregations. Concerning the Swedish congregations, it was stated that 150 children and 10 adults had been baptized since the synod previous year. Among the adults were "four negroes and six white persons, one of whom had been a Quaker." 58 One more was reported to be under instruction, and in Malatte an Englishman had been instructed and baptized. 59

On April 29, 1781, Matthias Hultgren baptized three women after the service in Upper Merion Church, Catharine Enocks, born 1756, Rebecka Thomas, born 1761, and Hahna Potts, born 1762. "These had been appropriately instructed by me several times before, so that they could give reason for the hope they nourished.," Hultgren com-

56 Tappert & Dobberstein, The Journals Vol. I, 459-460. In a letter to Wrangel, dated in Providence, August 12, 1761, Mühlenberg gives the information that there were actually two Quakers on Tinnicum, married to two Swedish sisters, who had been baptized by Wrangel. Aland, Die Korrespondenz Vol. II, 475-476.
58 Documentary History Part I, 63.
59 Ibid. The situation was similar in the German-Lutheran congregations.
mented. Hultgren provides another case from 1784, when the 18-year-old Quaker Mary Smallwood was baptized having been taught the main articles of the Lutheran faith. In 1785 Matthias Hultgren reports on a similar case, when Elizabeth Hultgren, the wife of a Swedish sailor, Swen Hultgren, was baptized in Gloria Dei Church after having been instructed by the pastor. "She was 22 years old and previously raised in the Quaker religion." An unsuccessful attempt at conversion from Quakerism to the Evangelical faith is recorded in Anders Borell’s diary for 1762.

Very few Native Americans were converted as a result of the Swedish mission. However, the following entry is found in the baptismal register of Holy Trinity Church for the year of 1718: "The Indians Meckanappit and Gertrude Toene’s child Philip, 8 years old last August 15th, Sponsors, Johan Hindricsson and his wife Brita, who had adopted the boy for their foster child." There are a few more examples of African American baptisms in the Swedish congregations. Having accounted for the baptism of Johan and Elizabeth Månsson’s son Johannes with the usual array of sponsors, the baptismal register of Penns Neck laconically adds: "On the same day was also baptized: William Wiggorie’s negro, Tobias." In 1714 "William de Ver’s old negro Christian" was baptized, and on February 3, 1723, "George Hugel’s negress Alki’s daughter Anna, a mulatto, 20 years old" was baptized in the Christina congregation. The negress Peggy’s child Peter” was baptized in the parsonage, one day old, in 1725, and two years later Peggy’s five-day-old daughter Elizabeth was baptized. This Peggy was the property of the church, bought in 1724 for 45 pounds, the pastor contributing 5 pounds from his own purse. Even though Peggy’s "ecclesiastical" status could explain the baptism of her children, she was not a completely exceptional case. The baptismal register of 1749 for the Christina congregation has the following entry: "The child Phoebe, born 9th of January, baptized 18th of December, the parents negroes." There are a few more entries referring to African Americans, for instance two illegitimate mulatto children who were baptized in 1723, but they are rare occurrences. One of these is found in the list of members of the Raccoon congregation in 1786, where Nils Collin accounts for an African American family:

A family of negroes, whom I have baptized. The man Cudjo, still a slave. The wife Venus, now free. Children Cudjo 15, Robert 9, Zvamany 8, Martha 6, Jesse 5, James 2, John 1 year of age. Both are quite kind

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63 Anders Borrell’s Diary, AJP 60:5.
64 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 244.
65 See the above mentioned baptisms of six African Americans reported on the 1762 synodal meeting.
66 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 245.
67 The Records of Holy Trinity, pp. 222, 279.
68 The Records of Holy Trinity, pp. 293, 301.
69 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 408.
70 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 286.
and the man gave 2 dollars to the new church. Many of the blacks have good inclinations, and if they were taken care of properly, they could become good Christians.\footnote{Collin, "Pastor Nils Collins dagbok", p. 61/102.}

Of course, this was an exceptional case, forming the last entry of the list. But also in Penns Neck, Collin accounted for a black member. The widow Rachel Boon’s “negroe man Robin comes to church, but his wife, who is also black, prefers the Presbyterians”.\footnote{Collin, "Pastor Nils Collins dagbok", pp. 64/105f.} However, there is no information about baptism in this entry.

Dean Carl Magnus Wrangel reported in 1760 to have baptized more than 20 African Americans.\footnote{Letter from Carl Magnus Wrangel to the Archbishop, dated in Wicaco, October 13, 1760. \textit{AUC FVIII:6. Nils Jacobsson, Bland svenskamerikaner och gustavianer. Ur Carl Magnus Wrangels levnadshistoria 1727-1786.} Stockholm 1953, p. 107.} According to Wrangel, they were “negroe slaves living in the congregation”. Obviously, they were not reckoned as full members of Wicaco congregation, as they do not appear in the church records. Wrangel’s efforts to convert African Americans are vividly depicted in a conversion narrative that was printed after his return to Sweden.\footnote{Carl Magnus Wrangel, \textit{Guds Nädes Rikedom Emot Syndare, Uppenbarad Wid En Negers märkeliga omvändelse ifrån et gräseligt Hedniskt mörker til Evangelii herliga ljus (etc.).} Stockholm 1770. Jacobsson, \textit{Bland svenskamerikaner och gustavianer}, pp. 151-161.} After the successful conversion in 1764 of the slave Thomas, sentenced to death for murder, Wrangel claimed to have baptized another 28 slaves who had been awakened by the happy event.\footnote{The information that Andreas Hesselius baptized 44 “gentiles” during his American pastorate (1713-1723) is interpreted by Nils Jacobsson as conversion of “negroe slaves”. Jacobsson, \textit{Bland svenskamerikaner och gustavianer}, pp. 62, 151. Neither the Wrangel slaves, nor the Hesselius converts can be identified in the church records.}

\textit{Responsible Protestantism}

In some cases non-members were baptized by the Swedish ministers in America. This might have been the case with the African Americans that Carl Magnus Wrangel claimed to have baptized. In his revivalist approach, Wrangel did not restrict himself to the Swedish congregations, but extended his ministerial service to a wider field.

On specific occasions the baptisms of Anglicans are recorded in the Swedish church books. When Samuel Hesselius was serving the Anglican churches of St. James and Apoquinimy, he simply included the baptisms performed in these churches in the baptismal register of the Christina congregation. Even if Hesselius was accused of spending too much time in the Anglican churches,\footnote{Lindmark, “Swedish Lutherans”.} he was not able to visit each church every week. Consequently, there is reason to believe that the inclusion of Anglican baptisms raised the average age of baptism for the years in question. In 1722 especially, lots of late baptisms are recorded for the Anglican congregations. Visiting the church of Apoquinimy on March 4, Hesselius baptized five children, only one being
under one month of age. A similar case occurred in Bohemia, where Hesselius served on April 28 the same year. Out of 14 people baptized, the youngest was almost six months old. When Hesselius visited Apoquinimy on March 24, 1723, two children were baptized, two and four years old, respectively. In comparison with most of the baptisms performed in Apoquinimy during those years, they appear as infant baptisms, even though they do not comply with Swedish standards. Visiting Apoquinimy on August 4 the same year, Hesselius baptized the girl Sara, five and a half years old, daughter of Benjamin and Rachel Allmond, and on September 1, he christened William and James Griffin, 18 and 15 years old, sons of Samuel and Margareta Griffin. No more examples are needed to prove the fact that the custom of baptism had declined among the Anglicans during the long periods of vacancy. At the same time there is sufficient evidence to state that the frequency of late baptisms would have been lower if the Anglican baptisms had been excluded from the baptismal registers.

There were also other cases when non-members were more incidentally baptized by Swedish Lutheran ministers. In 1714, a son of German Presbyterians was baptized in Christina. The baptismal register of the Raccoon congregation for 1718 has the following entry: "On March 9, was baptised Anders Jones’ Maria, they do not belong to our Church." In other sources there is much evidence of Swedish ministers serving a broader Protestant congregation regardless of formal membership. However, most of those baptisms have not been recorded in the baptismal registers of the Swedish Lutheran congregations, but there are a few examples.

In 1762 Dean Carl Magnus Wrangel traveled to Manathany, and during the journey he kept a journal. On June 13, he conducted service in the church of Manathany, where he baptized one 18-year-old of Swedish descent and 18 "English" children. When the English mass was ended, the Germans entered the church, and during the German service Wrangel baptized another 12 children. At the beginning of May 1763, the New Jersey minister Johan Wicksell went to Rapapo, where he baptized four children of English parents. These families had previously been living far up in the country among the Native Americans, and had come down during the war. During his sermon, in which he emphasized the necessity and usefulness of baptism, one of the mothers was moved to confess her unbaptized status. After preparing her through instruction in the main articles of the Lutheran faith, she was baptized publicly in the church.

77 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 270.
78 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 271.
79 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 279.
80 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 280.
81 The statistical analysis will be more elaborated in the next version of this paper. Diagram 3 does not reflect the actual increase in infant baptisms in the Christina congregation, as most of the reduction in baptismal age is compensated for by the high frequency of late baptisms in the Anglican churches. Nor do the five-year cohorts do justice to the changes in the 1720s.
82 The Records of Holy Trinity, p. 225.
84 Carl Magnus Wrangel’s Diary. AJP 60:7.
85 Johan Wicksell’s Diary. AJP 60:8.
7. Unbaptized members

When Swedish Lutherans intermarried with Quakers, the Quaker spouses were reckoned as non-baptized members, as long as church membership was a family concern. But the children in such mixed marriages also ran the risk of remaining unbaptized. On Whit Sunday 1779, the pastor of Wicaco, Matthias Hultgren, baptized four children having conducted service in the Swedish church of Upper Merion. In his account of his ministerial services, Hultgren gives the following report:

Three of them were aged 6, 5 and 4 years. When the act of baptism was concluded, the father of these children asked me to christen the children’s mother, too. Asked about this peculiar request, the mother turned out to be born by Quakers. I then made clear to this woman that she first had to be instructed in our Evangelical-Lutheran doctrine, and offered her my service and advice in this respect. Then I went to their house for this reason, but finally she did not dare to take this step, fearing the repugnance of her relatives.86

In this case the Quaker mother continued to be an unbaptized member of the congregation. Without specific reference to Quakerism, Hultgren reports on a similar and more successful family baptism on December 28, 1783, when Hezechiel Rambo’s wife Elizabeth became a member of the Swedish congregation. Shortly afterwards the four children were also baptized.87 Probably for the same reason, the children of William and Margaret Wilson were not baptized until Christmas Day, 1781. Then Elizabeth, 17, Susanah, 10, David, 5, John, 3, and Deborah, six months old, were christened in Upper Merion Church, the two eldest having studied the catechism some time earlier.88

Ethno-religious intermarriage with Quakers was not the only reason unbaptized children occur in the church records. In 1783, Hultgren baptized the children of the churchwarden in Wicaco, Reynold Keen, the daughter Sarah being 6 years old and the son Lawrence almost one year. "Mr. Keen keeps to the English church with his family, but their children are christened by Swedish ministers," Hultgren commented.89 Apparently, Keen’s double membership did not guarantee his children’s early baptism.

Even if most of the reported cases resulted in baptism, they nevertheless reveal the existence of unbaptized members. But as long as the information is collected from baptismal records and reports on ministerial services conducted, the members who remained unbaptized are undetected. However, Nils Collin’s diary and membership lists from 1786 have more systematic notes on baptism. I will start by examining the membership list for the Raccoon and Penns Neck congregations covering the period between 1770 and 1786, but probably drawn up in 1786 when Collin left the congrega-

tions to become pastor of Wicacoa. Among the 161 families enumerated for Raccoon, the following unbaptized members of the congregation are found.

In the area of Rapapo, for a long time totally dominated by Swedes, the children of Jesper and Christina Lock were recorded as "not yet baptized".90 Closer to Raccoon church lived the old churchwarden John Rambo. His daughter Sara was married to an Anabaptist, "who did not allow me to baptize her 3 children", Collin commented in his diary.91 In the same area lived Jeffrej Clark, justice of the peace. "When the wife, who was a Quaker, is dead, the children, who are 3, will be baptized," Collin noted hopefully.92 In a district 10 kilometers south-east from the church, lived Miles Denny and his family. His wife was not registered as a church member, which could explain why the children were not yet baptized.93 Daniel Stanton with his Quaker wife and three unbaptized children lived 15 kilometers south-west from the church.94 In the same neighborhood lived also the "half Quaker" Wiljam Kej with his Swedish wife Elizabeth. The children were still unbaptized, but the parents had promised to present them at the font.95 In a certain area located at a distance of 5-7 kilometers to the north-west of Raccoon church, another family was found, whose religious life was characterized by intermarriage. Benjamin Rambo was a Swede by birth, and a member of the church council. Furthermore:

The whole family is among the best, they are frequent church attendants, and they have always given proof of great friendship. Yet, the wife and the children are still unbaptized, as she was born a Quaker, and the first time married to a Presbyterian, and does not want to be baptized until she is completely convinced of its necessity, in which case she will not stay in the way of the children either. Such a mixture is found among the best. Even his first wife was a Quaker.96

Even in the next generation a religious intermarriage took place. The stepdaughter of Benjamin Rambo, Sara, herself born of a Quaker mother, was married to the Swede Jonas Lock. But even if Sara was recorded as unbaptized, she allowed her daughter Christina to be baptized.97 Another case of ethno-religious intermarriage with a Quaker woman is recorded from the same neighborhood. Peter Adams, born to a mixed marriage between a Swedish man and a Quaker woman, was himself married to a Quaker, Agnes, whith whom he had one son and one daughter. The daughter, who was younger, was not baptized yet, "because a mother arrogates to herself more right over

91 Collin, "Pastor Nils Collins dagbok", p. 41/82.
92 Collin, "Pastor Nils Collins dagbok", p. 41/82.
the daughters”, Collin comments.98 The case was obviously the opposite for the Quaker woman Hanna, who married the Swede Jacob Henricson. Three years after the birth of her son Jacob, she was baptized herself.99 The widow Ruth Adams in the same district had been married to a Quaker, which was why some of their five children, aged from 14 to 29, had not been baptized.

Turning to the closest circle around the church of Raccoon, Nils Collin lists the members living within a distance of 5 kilometers from the church. The Swede William Huling’s Quaker wife and their two children were unbaptized.100 Two sons of Jacob Stille’s wife Elizabeth from her first marriage with Samuel Linch were unbaptized, even though they were registered as 19 and 17 years old, respectively. Gideon and Mary Denny’s son David was also unbaptized, but he was still an infant. Gideon’s brother Samuel was married to the Quaker Mary, who was unbaptized just like her children, ranging from 4 to 10 years of age.101 The Swedish widower Abraham Matson had many children with his Quaker wife. Hanna and Mary were baptized, but Thomas, Abraham, Acy, John, Rachel, Jonas, Sara, and Debora were not.102

There were also some unbaptized members of the Penns Neck congregation. However, they are not as numerous as in Raccoon, primarily due to the fact that the Penns Neck congregation was smaller. When Collin drew up the membership list, he did not account for more than 58 enumerated households in Penns Neck. The old Finn Andrew Sinnicson, the most wealthy and distinguished member of the congregation, had a daughter, Sara, who lived in the township of Salem and was “married to a medical doctor who not often attends a service, nor has had his children baptized”.103 Living between the churches of Raccoon and Penns Neck, the Hellms family was reckoned as one of the best. The widow Cathrine had a daughter who was married to a certain Ebenezer Pittman, “who is not yet baptized, but has declared his wish to so become, as soon as he has reached complete conviction of the necessity thereof”.104 Closer to the river lived Peter Applin with his family. Peter was still unbaptized, but had not declared himself unwilling.105 A couple of late baptisms are recorded in the same district. Hanna Dahlbo, married to Wiljam, was baptized on her wedding day, and Collin had baptized Elizabeth Laurence in 1778, 18 years old.106 This was not the case with Wiljam Biddle’s wife Hanna, and Alexander van Neaman’s wife Rebecca, who were still unbaptized.107

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The results presented from my examination of Nils Collin’s membership lists for the Swedish Lutheran congregations of New Jersey have clearly demonstrated that unbaptized members were a major problem, found especially in Quaker intermarriages, but spread even in wider circles.  

8. Baptism and membership

From 1713 the Swedish ministers took great pains to implement the Swedish church law in America. Both communion and baptismal customs were made the target of reform efforts, and in the 1720s both communion frequency and infant baptism rates increased rapidly. The existence of properly functioning sponsorship supports the characterization of the first decades of the 18th century as a period when a stable Swedish Lutheran church order was established. Behind this development lies an ethnic revival caused by the external pressure to which the American Swedes were exposed when new settlers arrived in huge number challenging the Swedes’ position as an old and privileged group. In order to defend their old rights, the American Swedes took measures to strengthen their ethnic identity and coherence. The distribution of Swedish literature, the founding of schools, the erection of churches, and the establishment of a Swedish Lutheran church order with well-educated Swedish ministers are obvious proofs of the interest in promoting Swedishness. In the light of this development, the maintenance of the institution of sponsorship appears another sign of the general striving towards increased ethnic coherence. From a similar perspective, the restrictive use of emergency baptism could be interpreted as reflecting the members’ wish to make use of the Swedish ministry in order to tighten the bonds of Swedishness and raise the status of the Swedish community.

It is obvious that the Swedish ministers had to face insuperable obstacles in their continued fight to preserve an ethnic membership in the latter part of the 18th century. Religious intermarriages of course constituted a specific problem, but the Church of Sweden could not even count on confessionally unquestioned members of the congregations. Nils Collin’s comment on the case of Felix Fisler reveals that neither Swedishness nor the Lutheran religion was expected from the Swedish Lutheran church in the 1780s. Felix Fisler and his Swedish wife Ruth were registered as members of the Raccoon congregation along with their four children,

108 A few examples are also found in the membership list of Wicaco, Kingsessing and Upper Merion congregation, 1784/86. Uppsala Consistory Archives, F VIII:8, 156-161. The State Regional Archives, Uppsala, Sweden.
109 The analysis is developed in more detail in Daniel Lindmark, "Literature for Swedish Lutherans in Colonial America, 1696-1730.” In: Geoffrey Sherington & Craig Campbell (Eds.), Education and Ethnicity. (Paedagogica Historica, Suppl. Series VII.) Gent 2001, pp. 35-54; and in Lindmark, ”Mobilizing Swedes”.
110 Without having undertaken any systematic examination of the sponsors, there is reason to state that sponsorship followed ethnic lines.
all of them unbaptized, even though the parents are not inclined to Quakerism, but some people are of the opinion, that the best thing to do is to let the children choose religion when they grow up, or they think that the responsibility of the parents at the covenant of baptism is too heavy.111

Could the principle of religious freedom and individual conviction be expressed more clearly? The problem of unbaptized members becomes even more conspicuous, when the principle of selection is taken into consideration. Collin has omitted all former or potential members who could no longer be considered as members. These potential members should include even more children of mixed marriages, even more people of different religious conviction, and even more religiously indifferent people. Having accounted for the members living in a settlement 10 kilometers north of Raccoon church, Nils Collin draws the following conclusion: "Moreover, there are several other people in this neighborhood, and some whose children I have baptized but keeping to nothing certain. That is the case everywhere in an ecclesia plantanda [missionary church]".112 A similar comment is made after the account of the members in another district, where many inhabitants could in some way be regarded as members. Collin had noticed an improvement in church commitment among those who had been indifferent. Young families especially returned to church and had their children baptized. As the settlement was situated 15 kilometers from Raccoon church, Collin had chosen to preach in one of the private houses in the district.113 When Collin accounted for some of the members living in a district close to the church he also made a similar comment, meaning that there were several inhabitants who occasionally attended service, but who could not yet be considered as members. Concluding the membership list of Raccoon and Penns Neck in 1786, the year of the cessation of the Swedish mission, Collin expressed his confusion:

It is not easy to say, how many people could be called members of such mixed congregations as our Swedish-Lutheran and other congregations in this country, as neither Orthodoxy, nor the use of the sacraments, nor a frequent church attendance, nor discipline, are useful criteria, but everyone is free to believe at his own discretion.114

Consequently, ethnicity was no longer a useful criterion of membership, as it was not even listed. But religious criteria were obviously not much easier to use, not even baptism could function as the foundation of membership. Having lost its primary basis of recruitment, i.e. the Swedish-speaking population, the Lutheran congregation did not find its Lutheranism attractive enough to secure a steady membership. In this situation Collin applied the idea of a "responsible Protestantism", meaning that he included as members all the Protestant people in the neighborhood who showed the slightest inter-

112 Collin, "Pastor Nils Collins dagbok", p. 43/84.
est in his services. At the same time, this was also a “pragmatic Protestantism” insofar as it secured the continued existence of the New Jersey churches.

9. From ethnic to religious membership – some tentative conclusions

The overarching purpose of this study has been to analyze the baptismal pattern of the Swedish Lutheran congregations in colonial America in order to define the character of the congregations as basically ethnic or religious communities. In this final section I will present some tentative conclusions on baptism and membership. Some of the conclusions are still so preliminary, that they might appear to be more like informed hypotheses than proven results. Further research is needed to lay a solid foundation for more definite conclusions. For instance, the examination of the age distribution at baptism should be extended to the congregations of Raccoon and Penns Neck.

A. Membership in the Swedish-American congregations was based upon two fundamental principles: ethnicity and religious conviction. All the Swedes in the Middle Colonies were reckoned as church members by birth, but people of different ethnic and religious descent could join the congregation after conversion. Baptism was a requirement for membership, but this was made obvious only in those cases when the applicants for membership had not been baptized previously, most frequently because they were born Quakers.

B. There is a general development from ethnic to religious membership in 18th-century America: individualism, secularization and religious indifference changed the conditions of church membership. The transition from collectivism to individualism can be traced in the decline of the institution of sponsorship. As to membership, the discrepancies between ethnic and religious membership made itself visible in the existence of unbaptized members. As long as the Swedish mission required the Swedish congregations to be ethnic communities, religious indifference created unbaptized members.

C. If congregational membership had been based exclusively upon individual religious commitment, all the members would have been baptized in accordance with the Lutheran doctrine. Only in a congregation where membership was hereditary or followed lines of kinship, would the problem of unbaptized members occur. Consequently, the children of religiously indifferent Swedes formed a majority of the unbaptized members. However, by the end of the period under examination, the discrepancy between hereditary membership and individual commitment involved more than people of Swedish descent. Practical and economic considerations also seem to have coincided with the national church tradition.

D. Religious intermarriage caused a delicate problem: neither the ethnic nor the religious definition of membership would apply. There are many examples of people of different ethnic and religious heritage being incorporated into the Swedish community, especially in the 17th and the early 18th centuries. For instance Anglicans and members
of the Dutch Reformed Church could easily fit in, but Quakers had to be baptized to gain membership. The problem of unbaptized children seems to appear most frequently in families based on religious intermarriage with Quakers. At the end of the period under examination, religious intermarriage no longer automatically resulted in incorporation. Church membership was no longer an issue for collective entities such as families, but a matter of individual conviction. This religious individualism could even lead the parents to leave the baptism for their children to decide.

E. What distinguished the Swedish-American congregations from their Swedish counterparts was the relatively high proportion of late baptisms. Most parents failed to fulfill the Church Law requirement of baptism within 8 days. Practical obstacles and parental neglect account for most of the late baptisms. However, a successful mission can be detected behind many of the non-infant and practically all of the adult baptisms. Not only Quakers, but also some Native and African Americans were accepted as members through baptism.

F. The Swedish Lutheran ministers did not restrict their baptismal service to children of congregation members and converts. Rather, the ministers acted as “responsible Protestants” administering baptism to everybody in need regardless of membership. Apart from the periods of heavy Swedish involvement in Anglican affairs, the registers account for many baptisms of children of Anglicans, Germans, and other non-members. The baptismal registers sometimes serve the function of ministerial journals rather than congregational records. However, in proper diaries and journals the ministers report a huge number of baptisms administered to people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. On the other hand, “responsible Protestantism” did not appear in the form of lay baptisms, as was the case in distant areas in Sweden. It probably served the interests of both the clergy and the congregations to reserve baptism as an almost exclusively ministerial duty.

G. There are interesting similarities between the Swedish-American congregations in the 18th century and the Church of Sweden in the 20th century. Originally defined as ethnic or national communities, both branches of the Swedish Lutheran church had to face the problem of unbaptized members, when the fundamental principle of being born into the Swedish Lutheran church was no longer followed by baptism. When the link between membership by birth and membership by religious conviction could not be sustained, the basis for membership had to be reconsidered. This development from national church to denomination took place two centuries earlier in America than in Sweden. In this process not only the Swedish, but also the Lutheran character of the Swedish Lutheran congregations was relinquished. All the Swedish churches in colonial America became affiliated with the Anglican or Episcopalian Church.