

SESSION TWO

Historical Influences

The Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was a religious movement in 16th century Europe that sought to reform some of the theological foundations and practices within the Roman Catholic Church. It was called “Roman” because the church headquarters and the Pope were in Rome. The word “catholic” means “universal.” It was called “Catholic” because it recognized there was one world-wide Church. Those who were protesting the evils in the Church were called “Protestants.” Since they were trying to reform the Church, they were also called “Reformers.” The movement they started was called the “Protestant Reformation.” Some of the early leaders of this movement include: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli.

The church groups or “denominations” that grew out of the Protestant Reformation are called “the Protestant Church.” Although there were significant differences in the beliefs of the different reformers and the churches they organized, they agreed on many principles. Some of these principles are:

- 1) The Bible is the final authority for the Christian.
- 2) Salvation is by grace through faith alone, apart from any required good works.
- 3) Christ is the head of the Church.
- 4) Everyone has the right to come to God directly through Christ.

The Evangelical Covenant Church

Three hundred and fifty years after the Protestant Reformation, the Covenant Church was formed. Three influences that were evident in this new denomination include:

- **The Protestant Reformation and the Lutheran Church:** The biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. This teaching came from the Lutheran Church in Sweden. It is one of the great teachings of the Bible that was recovered by the Protestant Reformation and emphasized by the Lutheran Church. In Sweden, however, everyone was baptized as a Lutheran and everyone was a member of the Church. All the people had been taught that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, but many of them did not have any personal relationship with Christ.
- **The Pietists:** The experience of a personal relationship with Christ. Pietism was a movement within Lutheranism in the late 17th-mid 18th century that focuses on individual piety

(devotion) and dynamic and personal Christian life. This movement sought to restore the life of the Church through the study of the Bible, the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, kind treatment for all people, including non-believers, and prominent devotional life in schools for theological training. To reflect this, the question often asked in Mission Friend (the early name for Covenanters) circles at that time was, “Are you yet walking with Christ?”

- **The Moravian Mission:** The joy that turns the Christian life into a celebration. The Moravian Mission was a movement that spanned the 9th century through the 1700s, which emphasized the joy of life in Christ and mission to those who did not yet know such joy. It also emphasized the unity of Christians.
- **Founding Rationale:** After unsuccessfully trying to reform the Swedish Lutheran churches in the U.S., and based on several factors—including a differing view of Christ’s atonement—the Covenant was founded to be a church where “we will be in mission for Jesus together as friends.”

This church is now called the Evangelical Covenant Church. The word “evangelical” means that this church believes in a personal relationship with Christ, and the word “covenant” refers to the agreement among the churches to work and to serve in one body.