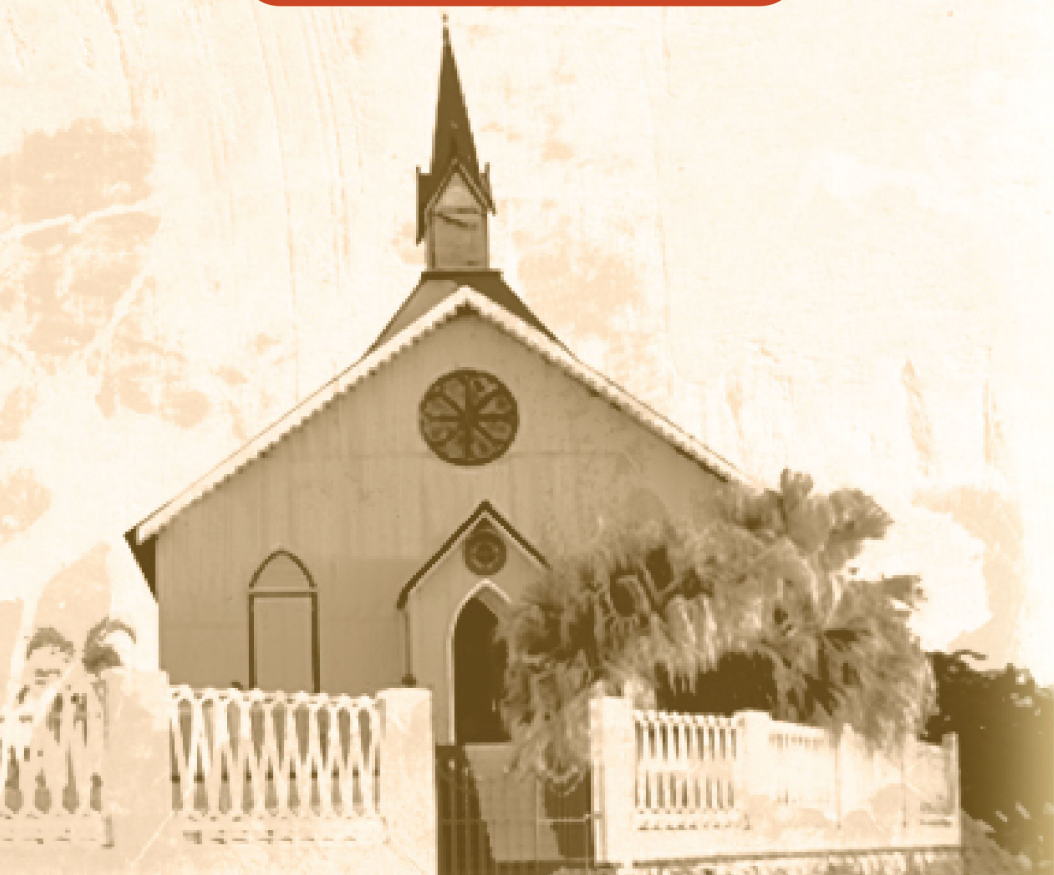


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Analysis of Evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic

Focus on Two Historical Protestant Churches:
The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Dominican Evangelical Church

Christina C. Davidson



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This publication is the result of the author's participation in the
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Dominican Republic***

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Foreword

Global Foundation for Democracy and Development (GFDD) and Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo (Funglode) are dedicated to promoting research and awareness in areas crucial to the sustainable development of the Dominican Republic and the world. GFDD and Funglode organize meetings, educational programs, research, studies and publications that contribute to creating new perspectives, enriching debates and public policy proposals, encouraging the search for innovative solutions and putting forth transformative initiatives at the national and international level.

GFDD and Funglode are honored to present the publication series Research and Ideas, which makes available to society the findings of research projects, academic articles and intellectual speeches, taking on crucial subjects in the contemporary world from local, regional and global perspectives.

In this instance, Christina C. Davidson analyzes the past and present of evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic, with a focus on two historic protestant churches: the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Dominican Evangelical Church (IED), both founded during decisive moments in the country's history. Drawing from historical documents and interviews with ecclesial leaders and authors specialized in the subject, this publication examines the way in which each institution has adapted to 21st century Dominican society without cutting ties to the United States. The research also investigates to what extent factors such as social marginalization, racial discrimination, the spread of the Dominican evangelical community and continual connection with US institutions have influenced the churches' history.

We hope this publication and the entire Research and Ideas series contribute to a better understanding of the world, empowering us to act in a more informed, efficient and harmonious way.

Natasha Despotovic
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GFDD

Preface

The Christian “message of hope” has become part of a religious transformation throughout the world, especially in Latin America and the Dominican Republic. Across this region, Protestant Christianity has gained a more prominent position alongside the dominant Christian religious institution — Catholicism — and encouraged people to transform their lives with faith and devotion.

This evolution of Protestantism over the past century, throughout the world and in Latin America, has been extensively reported on by multiple members of the public ranging from political analysts to church members. However, the current sociological literature on religion has rarely focused on the Caribbean region or the Dominican Republic specifically.

Given the shortfall in critical studies touching on the evolution of religion in countries like the Dominican Republic, this can lead to imprecise theories about the national status of evangelical Christianity.

To help remedy this situation, Dr. Christina Davidson joined the GFDD Fellows Program in 2014 to conduct in-country field research over a ten-month period from November 2014 to August 2015. During this time Christina focused her research on the history of Protestantism in the Dominican Republic and examined the establishment of Protestant Christianity in the country by carrying out numerous interviews and collecting data from church leaders and organizations such as the *Archivo General de la Nación* and the *Archivo de la Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana*.

Christina’s hard work enabled her to successfully put together a comprehensive overview of Dominican Protestantism and its evolution towards a self-conscious Dominican evangelical community and to what extent the two churches that she has focused have managed to adapt to modern Dominican society.

We therefore hope that this analysis of evangelical christianity will encourage debate at both the national and international level on economic, democratic and social development.

Marc Jourdan
UN PROGRAMS & OUTREACH MANAGER
GFDD

Acknowledgements

This research could not have been completed without the generous support of various organizations and individuals. I would especially like to thank GFDD/FUNGLODE's Fellow's Program. To Yamile Eusebio Paulino, Semiramis de Miranda and Marc Jourdan, your work has this study has made this publication possible. My sincere and humble appreciation goes to you.

In 2014-2015, Mandy Sciacchitano, Christty Armand, Lorient Sánchez made up the core Fellows Program team who helped formulate my study at the initial stages. I am grateful for Mandy's work in organizing my stay in the Dominican Republic. Thank you for working with me for over a year to coordinate my research. Christty worked diligently in helping me connect with key Pentecostal leaders of the Assemblies of God Church. She also coordinated my interviews with CODUE, Marcos Villamán and Bienvenido Alvarez. Lorient handled my lodging and transportation logistics, easing my transition to Santo Domingo. A host of other people who made up the FUNGLODE and Fellows Program support staff in Santo Domingo made my stay in the Dominican Republic possible, enjoyable, and fun.

Beyond GFDD/FUNGLODE, other organizations and individuals contributed to this study. I am grateful to the U.S. government's Fulbright-Hays fellows program, which funded my dissertation research in the Dominican Republic and made my extended research and collaboration with the GFDD/FUNGLODE Fellows Program possible. The U.S. Embassy and its Fulbright-Hays support staff were instrumental in connecting me to people at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo and helping me to acclimate to a new city.

Among Dominican organizations, the Consejo Dominicano de Unidad Evangélica (CODUE) was crucial in making this study possible. Rev. Fidel Lorenzo and Manasés Sépulveda of CODUE patiently endured my many questions about CODUE's history and Rev. Fidel Lorenzo's experiences leading a national Protestant Christian organization in the Dominican Republic. I am very grateful.

Three Dominican Protestant denominations officially supported this study even though only two of them are represented adequately in this publication. I am extremely grateful to the leaders and members of the AME, IED and Assemblies of God churches. Within the AME Church, I extend special thanks to: Bishop White, who presided over the Dominican Republic in 2014-15; Bishop Byfield, who currently presides over the country; Presiding Elder Abraham Rodríguez, Presiding Elder Jaime Coplin (now deceased), and Presiding Elder Leoncio King; Rev. Margarito Rodríguez, pastor of Nuevo Bethel I in Santo Domingo; Isabel Medina, the former national director of the Lay Organization and the current lay district president; and the host of pastors and local leaders who I interviewed while in the country. Within the IED Church, I extend special thanks to: Executive Secretary Rev. Miguel Angel Cancú; former Executive Secretary Rev. Samuel Grano de Oro; UMC Global Ministries Missionary and Dean of the IED theological seminary Rev. Osías Segura; and the many other individuals working in the IED's executive office in Santo Domingo, including Rev. Betonia Figueroa, Emerson James, José Peguero, Odalís Rosario, and Ardell and Gordy Graner. Within the Assemblies of God Church, I extend special thanks to: Executive Secretary Rev. Juan Abel Encarnación; Benjamín Silva; and the ministers I interviewed in Santo Domingo and San Pedro de Macorís, including Rev. Freddy Martínez, Rev. Félix Hernández, and Rev. Fabián Guerrero.

Four mentors provided invaluable academic advice during my research period in Santo Domingo. Long before meeting Marcos Villamán, Bienvenido Alvarez, and Martha Ellen Davis in person, I appreciated and learned from their publications on Dominican Protestantism. They are pioneers: Davis for having written about Protestantism during the start of the Pentecostal boom in the 1980s; Villamán and Alvarez for writing about contemporary Dominican Protestantism, which is still understudied. I did not know Benjamín Silva prior to moving to Santo Domingo, but I had heard of his work assisting various American historians throughout the years. His wealth of knowledge on San Pedro de Macorís and Protestantism is inspiring. During my tenure in Santo Domingo and on separate and various occasions, these four people took time to converse with me and make suggestions for my research. Their advice was indispensable. I am humbled and grateful to have met these mentors early in my academic career, and I look forward to our continued collaboration in the years to come.

There are many other people who have made this research possible: my dissertation director, Dr. Laurent Dubois; Dr. John D. French, who worked closely with me on my Fulbright-Hays application; Brendan J. Thornton, whose research on masculinity and Dominican Pentecostalism is breaking new analytical ground; and Micheline Crichlow and Adriane Lentz-Smith, both members of my dissertation committee. Other academic mentors at Duke University, Yale University, and across the United States have assisted me in years past. Thank you all.

Last, but not least, I am grateful to my family for always supporting me and encouraging me to follow my dreams. I am especially grateful to my mother, who planned a wedding without me while I was in Santo Domingo. And, I am grateful to my husband-then-fiancé, who visited me in the Dominican Republic on various occasions and patiently waited for me to return to the United States.

Abbreviations

AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church/Iglesia Africana Metodista Episcopal
AIPRAL	Alianza de Iglesias Presbiterianas para América Latina
BCWSD	Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo
CANACOM	Concilio de Misión Caribeño Norteamericano
CODUE	Confederación Dominicana de Unidad Evangélica
CONEDO	Confraternidad Evangélica Dominicana
CIEMAL	Consejo de Iglesias Metodistas para América Latina
CLAI	Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias
CMI	Consejo Mundial de Iglesias
COCODEC	Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church
IED	Dominican Evangelical Church/Iglesia Evangélica Episcopal
FUNGLODE	Fundación Global Democracia and Desarrollo
GFDD	Global Foundation for Democracy and Development
UNEV	Universidad National Evangélica

I. Introduction

This study examines the history and current state of evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic. It focuses on two historical Protestant denominations: The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Dominican Evangelical Church (IED). Each of these denominations was founded in the Dominican Republic during key moments in the country's history. Using historical documents and interviews with church leaders, this publication focuses on the ways that each institution has adapted to Dominican society in the twenty-first century while also maintaining ties to the United States. It additionally questions how factors such as social marginalization, racial discrimination, expansion of the Dominican evangelical community, and continued connections to U.S. institutions have affected the trajectory of these churches. Ultimately, this research analyzes how leaders of historical churches view their place within Dominican society and their historic and current relationships to U.S. institutions.

The study takes place in five parts. In the first section, the study presents a brief historiography of Dominican Protestantism and proposes a model for historicizing the multiple origin points of Dominican Protestant history. This model is used throughout the paper. The second section describes the research methods employed during the Fellow's Program internship in the Dominican Republic. The third section provides an overview of AME and IED history and describes the current state of the two churches in 2014-2015. The fourth section examines the evangelical religious sphere in 2014-2015 and the emergence of a self-conscious Dominican evangelical community since the 1980s. The last section analyzes how leaders of the AME and IED churches have reacted to the evangelical religious sphere and have attempted to adapt their church culture and structure to meet local needs and expectations. The research shows that although both denominations have adapted to Dominican society and have become part of a larger Dominican evangelical culture, structural limitations have made it difficult for these institutions to advance to the same degree as Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal Protestant groups.

II. Review of Literature and Periodization Model

The literature on Protestant religion in the Dominican Republic is meager compared to the literature on the Catholic Church. Yet, a few books and articles on the topic do exist. While these studies have focused largely on chronicling the marginalized history of Protestantism in a predominantly Catholic society, there is need for more historical analysis and academic critique within the historiography of Dominican Protestantism. This section reviews some of the major works within the literature and suggest that scholars engage critically with Protestant history on the island in order to promote more research and writing on this topic.¹ It also suggests a periodization of Protestant history that will guide the analysis of this paper.

The historiography of Dominican Protestantism is broadly comprised of two types of works: general histories and denominational histories. Of the general histories on Dominican Protestantism, William Louis Wipfler's thesis, "The Churches of the Dominican Republic in the Light of History," (1966) is the first English-language work to engage with this topic.² Written during a period of social unrest in the Dominican Republic and published on the heels of the United States' second occupation of the country, Wipfler's work seeks answers to why Christian churches were not growing in the country. Wipfler examined the history and state of various denominations, including the Catholic Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the Dominican Evangelical Church, and various fundamentalist and Pentecostal denominations. He noted that although "faulty strategy and chronic errors have played a considerable role in creating the present situation," two other elements were mainly at fault for stifling Protestant Christianity in the country. He claimed that, "The first is the scandal of the divided and often conflicting efforts of the churches. The second is the irrelevance of present Christian witness in the midst of the fundamental social changes taking place in the Republic."³ These observations were made to aid Protestant pastors

1. The reasons why the topic of Dominican Protestantism is only now becoming a subject of scholarly interests are varied, but are also directly linked to the historical dominance of the Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic. An amplified review article is needed to adequately address this issue as well as describe the sources that are available for the study of Dominican Protestantism.

2. William Wipfler, *The Churches of the Dominican Republic in the Light of History: A Study of the Root Causes of Current Problems* (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1966). This work was first written in 1964 as Wipfler's thesis for his Master's of Sacred Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He later published another book, *Power, Influence, and Impotence: The Church as a Socio-Political Factor in the Dominican Republic* (New York: 1978) on the same topic.

3. William Wipfler, *The Churches of the Dominican Republic in the Light of History: A Study of the Root Causes of Current Problems*, 181.

and American missionary boards in their evangelical work in the country. Thus, while Wipfler's work is "a source of information, bibliographical reference, and reflection," the purpose for which it was written limits both its scope and analysis.⁴ Today, Wipfler's study should be analyzed as a product of its time and purpose as well as a valuable reference source.

The first Spanish-language book to produce a comprehensive account of Dominican Protestant history was written nearly a decade after Wipfler's thesis, and remains the leading authority on Protestantism in the Dominican Republic. George Lockward's *El Protestantismo en Dominicana* (1976, 1982) traces nearly two centuries of Protestant activity on the island, and can be divided thematically into four parts (although Lockward makes no such division).⁵ First, Lockward marks the immigration of black North American freemen to Haiti during the period of Haitian unification (1822-1844) as the start of Protestant history in eastern Hispaniola. He focuses the first part of his book on the immigration history of 1824-1825 and the state of Protestantism on the island, beginning with the formation of the Dominican State in 1844 until the annexation and restoration period (1861-1865). The second part of the book examines the last few decades of the nineteenth century when thousands of Protestant West Indian migrants travel to the Dominican Republic to work in the burgeoning sugar plantations in the southeast. The third part provides information on various Protestant denominations that established themselves in the country after 1824.⁶ Last, Lockward describes ecumenical Protestant groups. A classic text, Lockward's work is the first text "to cover a biographical lacuna of Dominican [Protestant] historiography."⁷ Over thirty years have passed since the publication of *El Protestantismo en Dominicana* and it is still widely cited.

Despite the relevance of Lockward's work, it presents some limitations for the contemporary scholar. First, many events have occurred within the sphere of evangelical religion in the Dominican Republic since the 1980s. *El Protestantismo* does not account for the rapid rise of Pentecostalism over the last four decades and the proliferation of evangelical denominations and ecumenical groups.⁸ Second, *El Protestantismo* presents an even

4. Stated by the Junta de Directores de CIDOC SONDEROS in the presentation of Wipfler's work. Ibid., 5.

5. George A. Lockward, *El Protestantismo en Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Editora Educativa Dominicana, 1982).

6. The denominations included in Lockward's text are: "African Episcopal Methodist Church, Free Methodist Church, Moravian Church, Dominican Episcopal Church ... Pentecostals, Dominican Evangelical Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Church of the Brethren, Church of the Biblical Temples ... Evangelical Missionary Church, Mennonite Church, Jehovah's Witness, the Baptist Church". Ibid., 461-62.

7. Ibid., 8.

8. More recent Dominican scholars such as Bienvenido Álvarez Vega and Marcos Villamán have filled this

more fundamental limitation in that it does not offer a theoretical or historiographical argument. Even Lockward noted that, “this study highlights many issues worthy of better and more thorough research; issues relevant to the history of Dominican culture. And I hope they will serve in the future for others to develop them with better means and skills than those possessed by this author.”⁹ Lockward’s call for deeper analyses of Protestant history and the current state of evangelical society in the Dominican Republic is even more pertinent now that Protestants comprise almost a quarter of the Dominican population.¹⁰

Other more recent Dominican publications, such as *El campo religioso dominicano en la década de los 90’s: Diversidad y expansión* (1998) and *Presencia Protestante en la Isla* (2007), have advanced knowledge of Protestant history in the country.¹¹ Edited by the Departamento de Estudios de Sociedad y Religión, the first work is a compilation of essays that recount the history of various denominations on the island, including the Catholic Church, the IED and Episcopal churches, the Mormon and Seventh-Day Adventist churches, various Pentecostal denominations, and popular religion. This book is useful because it puts various denominational histories into conversation, and provides a more diverse understanding of Dominican religious history. One of the limitations, however, is that as an edited volume, the book does not present a coherent theoretical critique that is weaved through every chapter. Still, the introduction, written by Marcos Villamán, provides some ways of thinking theoretically about religion in Dominican society. The second book is written by Luis Alberto Díaz and presents interesting biographies of Protestant leaders, such as the lives of Jacob James Sr. and Jacob James Jr. (father and son), who ministered in Samaná at the turn

gap in knowledge with their analyses of Pentecostalism, but there is much work to be done. Bienvenido Alvarez Vega, “El Movimiento Pentecostal,” in *El campo religioso dominicano en la década de los 90’s: Diversidad y expansión* (Santo Domingo: Departamento de Estudios de Sociedad y Religión, Inc., 1996), 101–50; Marcos Villamán, “Escenarios Posibles: entre la Muerte y la Vida, Ocasiones para la Religión,” *Estudios Sociales* 38, no. 139 (2005): 9–54; Marcos Villamán, “La vuelta de lo sagrado: religión y dinámica social,” *Ciencia y Sociedad* 27, no. 4 (2002): 504–48; Marcos Villamán, *El auge pentecostal: Certeza, identidad, salvación* (Mexico City: Centro Antonio de Montesinos, 1993).

9. Lockward, *El Protestantismo en Dominicana*, 8.

10. Pew Research Center, “Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region,” November 13, 2014, 14. According to this report, Dominican Protestants account for 23% of the Dominican population.

11. *El campo religioso dominicano en la década de los 90’s: Diversidad y expansión* (Santo Domingo: Departamento de Estudios de Sociedad y Religión, Inc., 1998); Luis Alberto Díaz, *Presencia protestante en la isla: Apuntes históricos* (Santo Domingo: Jojansen C. por A., 2007). This study omits Alfonso Lockward’s and Emilio Betances’s works on Dominican Christianity because, while both write extensively on Protestantism, their focus is Catholicism. See Alfonso Lockward, *Intolerancia y libertad de cultos en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Distribuidora y Editora de Literatura Evangélica, 1993); Emelio Betances, *La iglesia católica y la política del poder en América Latina: El caso dominicano en perspectiva comparada* (Santo Domingo: Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo - FUNGLODE, 2009).

of the twentieth century. Salomón Feliciano, the pioneer of Dominican Pentecostalism, is also included in this work. With these details, Díaz's book provides a nice complement to Lockward's work, although it too lacks a broader historical argument.

Despite the usefulness of the few comprehensive works mentioned above, to date, the bulk of studies about Dominican Protestantism are authored by evangelical clergy or lay members, who have produced denominational histories.¹² While all denominational histories are valuable for the information that they provide, some of them lack the objectivity and critical analysis that academic scholars value. The achievements of this body of literature, however, should not be dismissed. It is equally important to note that the authors of such works have often overcome great barriers—particularly access to documentation and secondary literature in Spanish—in order to publish said histories.¹³ Moreover, there are notable exceptions. Wipfler and Wheaton's volume on the Episcopal Church, *Triunfando sobre las tragedias* (1997), for example, stands out for its critical assessment of how racial discrimination impacted missionary thought and action in the Dominican Republic. The book also attempts to place the Episcopal Church's history within the historical context of the country.¹⁴ Samuel Santana's *Los Carpinteros de Dios* (2006) provides another example in which the author systematically presents the history of the Assemblies of God Church within the broader historical context.¹⁵ Still, books and articles that fall within the category of denominational histories—specifically those written without much critical analysis—tend to be more useful to academic researchers for the facts they provide about specific denominations than for their theoretical arguments. The important work of collecting these histories, compiling the information

12. For Pentecostal histories see: James M. Beaty and Virginia Green Beaty, *So Much to Be Done* (Cleveland, Tennessee: Pathway Press, 2003); Porfirio Cabral, *Desde pentecostés hasta Santo Domingo: Breve historia del origen de la iglesia pentecostal en la República Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Publicaciones Bernard, 1991); Samuel Santana, *Los Carpinteros de Dios*, 2006; For the IED see: Miguel Limardo, *Una sola pasión* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial y Librería la Reforma, 1976); Odell, It Came to Pass (New York: Board of National Missions, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1952); Roca, *Horizontes de esperanza. Historia de la Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana*; Susana Sánchez, *Quisqueya cuenta su historia y celebra su fe: Puerto Plata y Samaná cunas del protestantismo dominicano y caribeño: Iglesia wesleyana, fe-negritud-esclavitud* (Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Mediabyte, 2008); For the Episcopal Church see: Wheaton and Wipfler, *Triunfando sobre las tragedias. Historia centenaria de la Iglesia Episcopal Dominicana, 1897-1997* (Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Editora Educativa Dominicana, 1997). This list is by no means exhaustive. It includes published books that are easily accessible in the United States and the Dominican Republic. More histories are likely to exist in the form of unpublished manuscripts on the island.

13. Historical marginalization of Protestant groups, the poor state of available documents, and the inability of most Dominicans to pursue higher education in a humanistic field such as history accounts for additional barriers.

14. Wheaton and Wipfler, *Triunfando sobre las tragedias*.

15. This book was given to me by the General Secretary of the Assemblies of God, Juan Abel Encarnación, in Santo Domingo. It does not have a publisher or place of publication. The author is a minister of the Assemblies of God Church, a journalist, and the communications specialist for the Assemblies of God.

found in them, and analyzing them as a body of literature has yet to be done in the contemporary period.

Within the current literature on Dominican Protestantism, it is common practice to provide a timeline of Protestant history; some works have even included a summary of the Protestant Reformation as necessary background literature. A few factors motivate this practice. First, given the history of Catholicism on the island and the fact that the majority of the population remains Catholic, it is important to provide contextual information on Protestantism for readers who may be unfamiliar with its history. Second, this practice frames Protestant history in terms of its Western European heritage, a common practice within Dominican historiography. Last, it also reflects the fact that in the Dominican Republic the terms *evangélico* and *cristiano* tend to signal an all-encompassing Protestant Christian identity.¹⁶ This is not to say that denominational distinctions do not matter to Dominican Protestants or that Dominicans do not value differences such as the variance between historical and Pentecostal churches. They do on both accounts. Yet, this study contends that popular understanding of a united evangelical identity, despite variance in practice, means that Protestant history is commonly viewed as universal for all Dominican evangelicals. Thus, for example, the Protestant Reformation, the 1824-1826 immigration of black freemen from the United States, and the late nineteenth century immigration of West Indian laborers are frequently mentioned in the extant literature.¹⁷ While it is important to note the contributions of these groups, the current tendency to provide a Protestant history timeline can obscure the fact that Dominican Protestantism actually has multiple origin points.

Instead of reiterating the Protestant timeline in prose, this study present the information typically found in such timelines as a periodization model [Figure 1]. The aim is to clearly name and present divisions in the timelines that others have developed (while adding a few variations) in order to plainly demonstrate that multiple origin points of Dominican Protestantism exist. The model below challenges the tendency to view Protestant history as a continuum leading up to the present day. Thus, it does not follow a typical periodization of Dominican history. Ultimately,

16. This common way of thinking differs from the United States where denominational differences matter to a greater extent.

17. The author has argued elsewhere that Protestant inclusion allows for a distancing of blackness. Christina C. Davidson, "Disrupting Silences: The AME Church and Dominican-Haitian Relations," *Journal of Africana Religions* 5, no. 1 (2017).

the goal is to encourage the current academic discourse towards a broader discussion of the complexities within each period of Protestant history and the intricate ways that these periods are related—particularly at points of transition between periods.

Pre-Organization	Period of Intentional Protestant Church Organization								
Precursor History	Historical Church Organization				Pentecostal Organization			Proliferation of Evangelical Organization	
Pre-1822	1822-1880	1880-1905	1905-1919	1920-1930s	1918-1930s	1940-1950s	1960-1979	1980-1990s	2000-present
Colonial Period (Important dates: 1594, 1605-1606)	Isolated Organized Missionary Activity	Organized Missionary Activity & Independent Missions	Proliferation of Organized Missionary Activity & American Missionary Planning	American Consolidation & Dominance in Organized Missionary Activity	Pentecostal Beginnings & Missionary Organization via Puerto Rico	Organization of First Pentecostal Denominations	Second wave Pentecostal Organization	Neo-Pentecostal & National Evangelical Organization	Evangelical Political Organization & Increased Participation in Media and Government

Figure 1: Periodization of Protestant History in the Dominican Republic.

A chart and description of the Periodization of Protestant History model [Figure 1] appears in the three pages following this section. The first row represents the Dominican Protestant history as a continuum. It is divided into two moments, pre-organization (i.e. the colonial era) and the period of intentional Protestant Church Organization that began in 1824 with the arrival of black emigrants from the United States. The second row suggests a division of this history into four distinct moments. Since these moments overlap, the corresponding dates (row three) are not hard rules but represent a rough periodization. The four periods in the second row are titled: “Precursor History” (1492-1880), “Historical Church Organization” (1880-1929), “Pentecostal Organization” (1930-1979), and “Proliferation of Evangelical Organization” (1980-present). Each period is further subdivided into stages. The second row deviates significantly from the extant literature in placing the period 1824-1880 within “Precursor History.” This choice was made because until 1880, the isolated missionary activity under the Wesleyan Methodists in the northern regions of Hispaniola was not intentionally aimed at converting Spanish-speaking Catholic Dominicans. Starting with the AME Church in 1882, the discourse regarding Protestant conversion of Catholics changed and throughout the sub-period of “Organized Missionary Activity & Independent Missions,” African American and British missionaries began to institute Spanish-language Protestant church work. Descriptions for the 1880-1905 period reflect these facts based on the author’s research. The other sub-divisions roughly follow the timelines that other scholars have

set forth in the extant literature. As scholarship on the various periods of Dominican Protestantism set forth in this model increases, further development and adaptation of this periodization model will be required.

When it comes to Dominican Protestant history, there is still much work to be done and many questions left to answer. In writing the timeline of Protestant history in the Dominican Republic, scholars have laid out the sequence of events that have led up to the current moment, but more research into the specificities of each moment is needed. To understand the impact of Protestant history within Dominican society, contextual questions about the lives of missionaries, denominational aims, and missionaries' experiences on the island need to be answered. Another set of question should interrogate the transitions between periods and the effects of the Dominican social context on Protestant religious groups. This type of work will enable nuanced answers to large questions such as, "What impact has the Protestant church had on Dominican society and culture?" Or, "In what ways has public opinion about Protestantism changed over time?" Neither a timeline nor a periodization model cannot answer these questions. Only through historical research and analysis can scholars begin to see the larger sociological and cultural effects of Dominican Protestant history.

Recently, scholarship on Dominican Protestant history has begun to make inroads. Along with Marcos Villamán and Bienvenido Álvarez Vega, Daniel Escher and Brendan Thornton have published on Dominican Pentecostalism.¹⁸ At the other end of the periodization model, new works by Sara Fanning and Denis Hidalgo have increased understandings of the 1824-1826 black U.S. immigration to Haiti, the role of the AME Church in the emigration process, the settlement of these immigrants on the island, and the formation of Wesleyan Methodist missions on the northern coast.¹⁹ Additionally, the author's own work has made insights into the 1880-1916 period.²⁰ Yet, there still remains a vacuum of scholarly work for the periods of "Historical Church Organization" (1880-1930s) and the first periods of Pentecostal organization (1930-1960). More research on the contemporary moment is also needed.

18. Brendan Jamal Thornton, *Negotiating Respect: Pentecostalism, Masculinity, and the Politics of Spiritual Authority in the Dominican Republic* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2016); Daniel F. Escher, "Religious Transformations: The Protestant Movement in the Dominican Republic," *Intersections* 10, no. 1 (2009): 519-70.

19. Dennis Hidalgo, *La primera inmigración de negros libertos norteamericanos y su asentamiento en la española (1824-1826)* (Santo Domingo: Academia Dominicana de la Historia, 2016); Sara Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

20. Christina Cecelia Davidson, "Black Protestants in a Catholic Land: The AME Church in the Dominican Republic 1899-1916," *New West Indian Guide* 89 (2015): 258-88.

Considering this need, this article asks a single question: “How are historical churches fairing in modern times?” Using interviews with religious leaders, archival research, contemporary church literature, and ethnographic observations, this study examines the impact of history on the current state of two historical Protestant denominations founded during the first and third periods of “Historical Church Organization”: the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the Dominican Evangelical Church (IED). It pays particular attention to the transnational dynamics within the churches and how they have changed over time. The aim of this preliminary study is to highlight the diversity and complexities of the Protestant religious sphere in the Dominican Republic. In the spirit of Lockward’s *El Protestantismo en Dominicana*, this paper is meant to deepen the conversation, and challenge others to interrogate both history and the current state of Protestantism in the country.

Precursor History: From the establishment of the first European colony on the island in 1493 until the last decades of the nineteenth century, Protestant activity was limited to certain isolated regions of the island. This period can be divided into two stages:

- The first stage represents the colonial era. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega has termed the period 1594 to 1606 as the “pre-history” period of Dominican Protestantism. During this period, the first mention of Huguenots is found in the historical record. The Spanish government and the Catholic Church both expressed concern about English and Dutch merchants who sold contraband in the north, particularly because both groups were Protestants. The distribution of Protestant Bibles in the north, and the public burning of 300 Protestant Bibles in Santo Domingo are also evidences of Protestant activity. According to Álvarez Vega, the Devastations of Osorio, when thousands of Spanish colonists were forced to relocate to Santo Domingo, concludes the “pre-history” period. The dates 1606-1822 are included in this periodization model because little is known about Protestant activity prior to Unification with Haiti. Further research should lead to a more precise periodization of these years.²¹
- The second stage is marked by isolated organized Anglophone missionary activity among American black freemen and black Caribbean migrants, especially in the north. The declaration of the

21. See footnote 5 in Alvarez Vega, “El movimiento pentecostal,” 102.

ephemeral independence in Dominican Republic (Independencia efímera by its Spanish name) in 1821 was quickly overshadowed by Haitian rule (1822-1844). During this period, thousands of black Protestants from the United States immigrated to the island, settling in various regions in the west and east. In 1844, the largest immigrant communities in Samaná, Puerto Plata, and Santo Domingo came under Dominican government. While many Protestant immigrants were affiliated with the AME Church prior to 1824, the AME Church began but did not sustain organized missions on the island. British Wesleyans ran missions in the northern coast beginning in the 1830s. By the 1870s, these missions kept contact with the group in Santo Domingo and included Anglophone migrants from other islands.

Historical Church Organization: Between 1880 and 1930 various historical churches established missionary work in the Dominican Republic. They joined the Wesleyans who were already active on the island. These denominations included the AME Church, the Moravian Church, the Free Methodist Church, and other American denominations. The period 1880-1930 can be further divided into three distinct stages:

- In the first stage, 1880-1905, three denominations—the Wesleyan Church, the AME Church, and the Episcopal Church ran organized missions on the island.²² A few other independent missionary congregations also existed in the capital, San Pedro de Macorís, and the Cibao. Significantly, this period is characterized by the establishment of self-conscious black congregations in the capital and San Pedro de Macorís. Contrary to popular thought, the black preachers working within these congregations did not only aim to convert Anglophone migrants, but also preached in Spanish in order to convert Spanish-speaking Dominicans. Their efforts were met with limited success.
- The second stage, 1905-1919, is marked by the proliferation of organized missionary activity in the Dominican Republic. At this point, white missionaries from the United States and the British Caribbean began to seriously plan for missionary activity on the

22. This study includes the Episcopal Church's activity in San Pedro de Macorís as part of this organized group despite its independent nature and its affiliation with Rev. Theodore Holly's independent Episcopal Church of Haiti. See Wheaton and Wipfler, *Triunfando sobre las tragedias. Historia centenaria de la iglesia episcopal dominicana*, 1897-1997, 27-40.

island. Their aims were varied. While some denominations (such as the Moravians and Episcopalians) implemented Anglophone missions for the purposes of preaching to the migrant West Indian and white American communities in the capital and San Pedro de Macorís, others (American Methodists and some Wesleyan missionaries) planned for Spanish missions. The implementation of such plans, however, did not occur at this moment.

- In the third stage, 1920-1930, white Americans implemented a large-scale missionary agenda through the formation of the Dominican Evangelical Church (IED). This period is marked by the consolidation and dominance of American missions. The IED originated from the unified efforts of the Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, and United Brethren denominations. It also stemmed from American missions in Puerto Rico and relied heavily on Puerto Rican missionaries and literature. Although other denominations such as the AME, Moravians, Anglicans, Free Methodists, and Wesleyans continued their operations, the IED overshadowed their work—particularly in the capital and southeast. Moreover, due to racism, the work of black ministers was marginalized and relegated to African-American and West Indian migrant groups (known as “cocolos”). In 1933-1934, the Wesleyan church integrated into the Dominican Evangelical Church. The Moravians did the same in the 1960s.

Pentecostal Organization: Pentecostalism has existed almost continuously since 1930. The Pentecostal denominations are distinct from the historical denominations in organization, theological beliefs, and practice, although both historical and Pentecostal churches fall within Protestantism. The organization of Pentecostalism should be viewed as distinct from the historical churches insofar as cultural exchange between Pentecostal and other historical churches was limited during much of the twentieth century. Pentecostal history can be divided into three stages:

- The first stage took place during the 1930s, when Pentecostalism was reestablished in the country. Although the first Pentecostal congregation was organized in San Pedro de Macorís in 1918, it later joined the Dominican Evangelical Church in 1922. In 1930, a Puerto Rican missionary, Francisco (Pancho) Hernández González, founded a Pentecostal mission in San Pedro. González worked as a missionary until 1938, organizing Pentecostal congregations in La Romana, Ramón Santana, Santiago de los Caballeros, and

Santo Domingo. The period is marked by the missionizing work of Puerto Rican preachers and pastors who, like Pancho González, worked among Dominican congregations, which remained small, poor, and instable throughout the 1930s; they also suffered religious persecution.

- The formal organization of the first Pentecostal denominations took place between 1939-1955, and falls inexactly between the 1940-1960 period. This period is characterized by the official incorporation of Dominican Pentecostal congregations under American and Puerto Rican denominations. Of the four largest Pentecostal denominations, the Iglesia de Dios (1939), Iglesia de Dios de la Profecía (1940), and the Assemblies of God (1941) were all established during this period and received missionary support from the United States.²³ The Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal Movimiento Internacional (1954) was affiliated with the Puerto Rican denomination. Five other Pentecostal denominations were established at this time.
- The period 1960-1979 is marked by the proliferation of Pentecostal denominations that flourished during a period of rapid urbanization that took place after Trujillo's death in 1961. During this time, dozens of other Pentecostal denominations were established, including independent (charismatic evangelical) denominations. It is important to also note, that some historical denominations and traditional Pentecostal churches became autonomous at this time.

Proliferation of Nations Evangelical Organization:

- The 1980s-90s is known as the period of greatest growth in Protestant (largely Pentecostal) Christianity in the country. It is characterized by the exponential growth in conversions and the diversification of traditional Pentecostal, independent charismatic churches, and neo-Pentecostal churches. At this time, the population of Dominican Pentecostals rose from the 10,000 to the 100,000. The numbers of Pentecostal denominations also grew to over 200.²⁴ Traditional churches began to show signs of Pentecostal

23. Although Pancho González operated under the Assemblies of God church, the official organization of the Assemblies of God in the Dominican Republic did not take place until 1941.

24. Villamán, *El auge pentecostal: Certeza, identidad, salvación*, 28.

influence. Also, national evangelical organizations like the Universidad Nacional Evangélica (UNEV, f. 1986), Confraternidad Evangélica Dominicana (CONEDO, f. 1983), and Confederación Dominicana de Unidad Evangélica (CODUE, f. 1993) were founded, and Protestants began to make inroads in politics.²⁵

- Since the early 2000s, the number of Dominican Protestants—mostly Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal—has continued to grow. The current period is marked by increased influence of Protestants in local and national government, and increased political organization among Protestants as a self-conscious evangelical community. Protestants are also represented in Dominican media, especially radio and T.V. Although Dominican Protestantism remains diverse in terms of religious belief and practice, in the last two decades Protestants have coalesced around important social issues in order to gain influence within Dominican society and obtain rights from the Dominican state. National groups, including CONEDO, CODUE, and UNEV wield a degree of power within the capital, and claim to speak for the evangelical community as a whole.

25. Bienvenido Alvarez Vega, “La incidencia pública de la iglesia,” in *Iglesia, sociedad y nuevas generaciones: Consulta de líderes cristianos*, ed. Tomás Gómez Bueno (Santo Domingo: Visión Mundial, 2014), 34.

III. Methods

To understand how changes in the religious landscape have impacted Dominican historical churches, this study relies on both archival research and interviews with Protestant community leaders in the Dominican Republic. The recorded interviews for this project were primarily conducted between November 2014 and August 2015 as part of the author's fellowship with the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development's (GFDD) Fellow's Program.²⁶ During that time, four national leaders of the Dominican Evangelical Church in Santo Domingo, three leaders of the Assemblies of God in Santo Domingo, a group of leaders from the same denomination in San Pedro de Macorís, and twelve leaders of the AME Church were interviewed. The author conducted the last group of interviews with Rev. Fidel Lorenzo, the president of Consejo Dominicano de Unidad Evangélica (CODUE) and Lic. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega, the journalist-scholar who has written extensively on Dominican Pentecostalism. This study also benefitted from the author's two meetings with Dr. Marcos Villamán, who served as an in-country mentor for this project. In total, the number of interviews amounted to twenty-two.

This paper cites only a fraction of these interviews. It is important to note that interviews with members of the AME Church were greater than with the other two groups because the author's research beyond this project focuses on the history of the AME denomination.²⁷ For the purposes of this study, two interviews with national leaders of the AME and IED churches will be examined in detail along with the interviews with Rev. Fidel Lorenzo Merán and Lic. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega. Thus, the sections below cite from the six interviews depicted in [Figure 2].²⁸ Each interview lasted between forty minutes to two hours. This study regards the recorded discussions as interviews with subject-matter experts and not as ethnographic interviews. The nature of the interviews were formal conversations in which the author asked Protestant leaders about their own trajectories in Protestant churches, their denomination's history, the current state of their denominations, the transnational relations in their denominations, and their ideas about the future.

26. The Fellows Program is run through the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development (GFDD) and the Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo (FUNGLODE). It provides research support to foreign M.S., M.A. and Ph.D. candidates in the Dominican Republic. See "About the Program," *Fellows Program*, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.drfellowsprogram.org/about.asp>. See also the last pages of this publication.

27. While in the Dominican Republic, the author also completed dissertation research on AME history and spent a greater part of her time at the Archivo de la Nación.

28. The author received written permission from these church leaders to print their names in published materials.

AME	IED	Other
Rev. Margarito Rodríguez	Rev. Miguel Angel Cancú	Rev. Fidel Lorenzo Merán
Dr. Isabel Medina	Lic. José Peguero	Lic. Bienvenido Álvarez-Vega

Figure 2: List of Interviews for this Study.

While the analysis in this article focuses on the historic AME and the IED denominations, the author also interviewed leaders of the Assemblies of God Pentecostal church. In interviewing a Pentecostal denomination, the original intention was to interrogate the ways that traditional Pentecostal denominations have adjusted in the current context. Since the Assemblies of God is one of the first traditional Pentecostal denominations on the island, its inclusion in this study would have provided an excellent comparison to the historical churches. Not only is its organizational structure similar to the historic churches (unlike independent and neo-Pentecostal denominations), but it also began as an American denomination. Moreover, the Dominican Assemblies of God maintains connections to the United States even though the denomination is now fully autonomous. This represents one area of possible future research. Because of time constraints, the author was unable to integrate into the Assemblies of God community in the capital in order to make ethnographic observations and collect a wide-array of literature as was done in the cases of the AME and IED churches.²⁹ Thus, research regarding the Assemblies of God denomination is preliminary and not fully represented in this publication.

In a similar vein, the Episcopal Church is also excluded from this study. As a historic denomination with lasting ties to the capital, San Pedro de Macorís, and the IED Church, the Episcopal Church would have been an excellent addition to this study. The author chose not to prioritize research on this denomination for a couple reasons. First, the historical cooperation between the Episcopal and IED churches (despite their theological distinctions) and their similar transnational dynamics led the author to choose the IED as a representative case study. Second, the author was interested in drawing a comparison between the AME and IED denominations specifically, which given their separate histories, represent a study of contrasts.

²⁹ The author is grateful to the Secretary of the Assemblies of God church, Juan Abel Encarnación, who met with her and introduced her to other Assemblies of God leaders.

In addition to expert interviews, analysis of the AME and IED denominations relies on archival research, contemporary church literature, and ethnographic observations. Archival research in the United States and the Dominican Republic was completed at various points between 2010-2016. Archival information is employed below to provide historical context. Contemporary church literature is used to describe the current state in the denominations, including published statistics and other facts. These documents were collected from the IED headquarters, from the national assemblies of each group, and from generous church leaders who shared their reports and personal archives with the author.³⁰ Last, the author spent time attending church services and activities, including the 2015 national assemblies, in order to understand how these denominations operate on a day-to-day basis and at the national level. Notes on these activities were taken. The author also met and spoke informally with American missionaries of the IED church. These missionaries are not the focus of this study, but their presence and friendship impacted the author's thinking, providing insight on the workings of transnational relationships within the IED denomination. The author had similar opportunities to interact with American missionaries of the AME Church in 2008, 2011, and 2014.

30. In the last case, the author is especially grateful to Samuel Grano de Oro and José Peguero of the IED, Juan Abel Encarnación and Benjamín Silva of the Assemblies of God, Margarito Rodríguez Jones of the AME Church, and Bienvenido Álvarez-Vega.

IV. Two Historical Churches in the Past and Present

The history of the AME and the IED denominations in the Dominican Republic could not be more distinct. Although both denominations derived from American Protestant institutions and share common theological ground, the AME Church became a marginalized institution in the Dominican Republic while the IED denomination became a prominent fixture in Dominican society. The factors that contributed to their different trajectories can be synthesized into two points. First, the AME Church did not have the financial resources, social prestige, or intentional method of investment in the Dominican Republic. The three American denominations that formed the IED's missionary board (the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the United Brethren), the Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo (BCWSD), did. Second, the fact that the AME Church was a self-conscious black church that became associated with marginalized English-speaking communities, while the IED church was led by white American and Puerto Rican ministers and became associated with the Dominican middle class is a corresponding factor that reflects the historical ideologies of race that governed both American and Dominican societies at the start of the twentieth century.

Today, the histories of each of these denominations have shaped their current statuses within Dominican society as well as their continued connections to the United States. The AME Church remains a small, economically disadvantaged denomination in the Dominican Republic. Unlike other historical denominations (and most Pentecostal ones as well) it is not autonomous, but continues to remain part of the AME Church in the United States. The IED on the other hand is autonomous, although it benefits from maintaining close ties to the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations in the United States.

3.1. The African Methodist Episcopal Church

The AME Church is known among Dominican historians and within Protestant circles for its role in the 1824-1826 Haitian Emigration Movement, which led to the immigration of free blacks from the United States to the island of Hispaniola. Less understood, however, is the fact that the AME denomination was not continuously organized in Hispaniola since that time. While it is true that many of the immigrants were associated with the denomination in the United States and established

religious societies in eastern and western Hispaniola, it is also true that these societies maintained limited connection to the United States throughout most of the nineteenth century.³¹

In the Dominican Republic, the modern AME Church emerged in the late nineteenth century, during the period of “Organized Missionary Activity and Independent Missions” (1880-1905). Indeed, the AME denomination was the first American organization to propose and implement missions on the Spanish side of the island. Contrary to what others have written, the thought process behind AME missions (as opposed to the reality of what took place) was to convert Spanish-speaking, Catholic Dominicans; it was not to remain isolated among English-speaking American immigrants and their descendants and West Indian migrants in San Pedro de Macorís and elsewhere. Isolation happened because of a two-fold process of racist and religious discrimination in the Dominican Republic and financial neglect from the AME denomination in the United States. This dual-process became most clear in the years between 1898 and 1930 when other white American and British denominations came to evangelize in the region, and when the AME Church in the United States further developed its missionary work in Africa.³²

Modern AME history began with the founding of the AME denomination in the capital of Santo Domingo in 1882. The reestablishment of the connection between American immigrants residing in the capital and the AME Church was instigated by the arrival of the U.S. Consul Henry Charles Clifford (H.C.C.) Astwood, who was ordained an AME preacher in the United States.³³ The AME congregation in Santo Domingo grew until 1890 when it split into two congregations due to internal controversy. For much of the 1890s, the AME church was left without a missionary leader. The denomination was rejuvenated in 1898 when Jacob Paul James Jr. took over the mission. James was the son of the famed preacher Jacob James of Samaná. James Jr. had spent fourteen years in the United States, where he became an AME preacher. Under James’s leadership the AME Church began to grow, but James Jr. wrote about the hardship that he faced in the capital. Not only did the Catholic Church oppose his work, but the high prices of the capital made it very expensive to maintain the poor congregation. Without any financial help from the United States,

31. Davidson, “*Black Protestants in a Catholic Land: The AME Church in the Dominican Republic 1899-1916*,” 265–66.

32. This argument is further developed in the author’s doctoral dissertation.

33. Astwood was originally from the Turks islands and became a naturalized U.S. citizen in the 1870s.

James left the capital and set up his missionary headquarters in Samaná in 1902. As the author demonstrates elsewhere, from 1902-1929, the AME Church was relegated to the Anglophone black migrant populations on the island—particularly in Samaná and San Pedro de Macoris.³⁴ After 1929, the population of West Indian migrants declined as sugar plantation owners began to rely more heavily on Haitian laborers. During this later period, the AME Church lost hundreds of members in the southeast. Thus, it became known as an institution of the Samaná “Americanos.”³⁵

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the AME Church remained a marginalized institution in Dominican society. Between 1930 and 1980, the denomination grew mostly within Samaná, and maintained congregations in Santo Domingo and San Pedro. Its work largely escaped the radar of the government and the broader Dominican society. Within local regions, AME leaders at times met persecution by Catholics and government officials, but such events were isolated. At the same time, the poverty of the denomination—particularly because it continued to lack financial support from the AME missionary board in the United States—prevented the church from making inroads in other sectors of the Dominican Republic, and thus African Methodists avoided drawing much attention to their work. In this way, the AME Church survived the Trujillo dictatorship and the subsequent presidency of Balaguer.

The relative isolation of the AME Church in Samaná and regions of the southeast, however, began to change in the 1980s with the proliferation of Pentecostal denominations. At first, the Pentecostal movements had a negative effect on AME churches, which began to lose members due to theological differences. For example, Pentecostals preached against baptizing children, which is part of the AME doctrine. AME church services also did not include the lively music and charismatic worship that is characteristic of Pentecostal churches. Consequently, many youth thus left the AME Church, attracted by the Pentecostal style of worship. In response

34. Davidson, “Black Protestants in a Catholic Land: The AME Church in the Dominican Republic 1899-1916.”

35. For information on the early history of the AME Church and African American communities in the Dominican Republic see: Davidson, “Black Protestants in a Catholic Land: The AME Church in the Dominican Republic 1899-1916”; Nehemia Willmore, “Esbozo histórico de la llegada de inmigrantes afro-americanos a la isla de Santo Domingo y Haití,” *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 36, no. 129 (2011): 247–75; Martha Ellen Davis, “Asentamiento y vida económica de los inmigrantes afroamericanos de Samaná. Testimonio de la profesora Martha Willmore (Leticia),” *Boletín Del Archivo General de La Nación* 32, no. 119 (2007): 709–33; Humberto García Muñiz and Jorge L. Giovannetti, “Garveyismo y racismo en el Caribe: El caso de la población cocola en la República Dominicana,” *Caribbean Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 139–211; Martha Ellen Davis, “That Old-Time Religion: Tradición y cambio en el enclave ‘Americano’ de Samaná,” in *Cultura y folklore de Samaná*, ed. Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz (Santo Domingo: Editora Alfa & Omega, 1984), 97–146; H. Hoetink, “‘Americans’ in Samaná,” *Caribbean Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 1962): 3–22.

to the declining membership, a new generation of AME leaders began to make changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Leaders incorporated more charismatic worship and did away with liturgy and infant baptism. Consequently, AME congregations began to grow, and over the past decade the AME Church has attracted new members who have no former connection to the Samaná region or the history of African-American or West Indian immigration.

Today the Dominican AME Church consists of over 2700 members and thirty congregations. The congregations range in size from a dozen people to over two hundred members, and are divided into two regional districts led by presiding elders (superintendents). The larger district is in the northeast and consists of nineteen churches and 1473 members. The largest churches are in Las Terrenas and Samaná with over two hundred members each. The Presiding Elder of the north is Rev. Leoncio King. The slightly smaller Southeast District has 1252 members and is led by Presiding Elder Abraham Rodríguez Jones. The largest churches in this district are Impacto de Vida in La Romana and Zion AME Church lead by Rev. Santurnino Valera in San Pedro de Macorís. There are also four AME congregations of various sizes in the capital. Most, but not all, of the leadership within the church comes from Samaná, and was raised Protestant. And, while it is true that the denomination has remained strongest in the regions where it has existed historically in the north and southeast, it is also true that the AME denomination has grown considerably in these regions and has even spread to Santiago. It was also formerly in San Francisco de Macorís. Indeed, the Dominican Republic is the fastest region of growth among all AME churches in the Caribbean. This growth is largely due to the proliferation of evangelical organization over the last thirty years in the Dominican Republic.³⁶

Coupled with the growth in membership and the Pentecostal changes within the AME Church over the last thirty years, leaders within the denomination have experienced a resurgence of American AME interest in the Dominican Republic. Stronger ties to the United States have grown since the 2000s, when the former AME youth leader and missionary, John Thomas III, visited the island and surveyed the denomination's work.³⁷

36. These statistics come from the 2014 AME Dominican Annual Conference minutes. In 2013, the bishop Sarah Frances Davis praised the Dominican Annual Conference for being the largest and fastest growing conference in the 16th District, which consists of eight Caribbean countries and England and France.

37. Since the AME Church does not have a formal missionary process nor conducts missionary work abroad, the denominations runs individual missionary projects in the form of a grant called the "Sojourner Missionary" fund. As a Sojourner, Thomas traveled across the Dominican Republic, visiting various churches in the process.

At the same time, Rev. Carolyn Tyler-Guidry, a female bishop, was sent to head the Caribbean region for the first time. Working together, Guidry and Thomas met with AME pastors and began to revive the American connection on the island, which had suffered from neglect.

The AME Church's structure is partially responsible for this pattern of neglect. The AME Church is organized into districts, conferences, and regions. Bishops preside over the highest level of organization, the district. There are twenty districts around the world. Districts 1-13 are located within the United States. Districts 14-20 encompass other countries, including the Dominican Republic, which is part of the Sixteenth District. In the Sixteenth District, the conferences are divided by country so that the Dominican Republic makes up one Annual Conference (i.e. "National Assembly" like in the IED). Conferences are sub divided into regional districts like the "north" and "south" districts described above. While this structure works on the national level, the fact that the sixteenth district is made up of several conferences representing the islands of Barbados, Haiti, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and more recently France and England, makes it extremely difficult to unify the district. Moreover, as a district of eleven different countries, the Sixteenth District is one of the most underfunded AME districts worldwide. It is also true that the majority of wealth in the AME denomination is reserved for districts 1-13 in the United States. The unequal distribution of funds has historically meant that the Dominican Republic has received very little money from the church in the United States. Moreover, as the only Spanish-speaking country within the AME denomination, the Dominican Republic has not received AME literature in a language its people can understand. The denomination's structure has thus privileged other regions over the Dominican Republic.

Nevertheless, Dominican leaders of the AME church still participate in international events, such as district planning meetings, the 2013 Investiture of the Bishop Sarah Frances Davis, and the 2012 and 2016 quadrennial general conferences.³⁸ These events provide venues in which Dominicans interact with various leaders of the AME church in the Caribbean, the United States, and the world. They are spaces through which the AME connection to the United States is maintained, despite the historic neglect and continued unequal distribution of funds. As this study will explain in the last section, they are also spaces of ideological conflict.

38. Only a select few Dominicans participate in such events. At the 2016 General Conference, for example, six Dominicans represented both the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

The modern AME Church is a space in which church leaders seek out various social networks and embrace transnational ties in order to adapt to the situations they face as Protestant leaders in a historically Catholic country. While the denomination has benefitted from the expansion of Dominican Pentecostalism and its adoption of charismatic worship, its historical and current connection to the United States also remain significant in the contemporary moment. In many ways, the Dominican AME Church is a historic denomination that exists at the cross-section between two seemingly opposing forces: Dominican evangelical culture and American traditions represented in the doctrine and structure of the black American AME Church.

3.2. The Dominican Evangelical Church

The Dominican Evangelical Church (i.e. Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana) was officially created in 1922 by the Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo (BCWSD), an American ecumenical organization that consisted of members from three U.S. denominations. Plans for white American ecumenical missionary work began a decade earlier in September 1911 when Philo W. Drury and Nathan H. Huffman, American missionaries in Puerto Rico, surveyed the Dominican Republic on behalf of the interdenominational Evangelical Union of Puerto Rico (EUPR). In their report entitled, "Occupancy of Santo Domingo by Evangelical Missions," Drury and Huffman proposed that American churches take a strong stand in favor of Dominican missions, and use their already established missionary work in Puerto Rico as a springboard for missions in the Dominican Republic.³⁹ This report was the first step in an American ecumenical missionary movement in the Dominican Republic, and it connected the country to similar American activity in Latin America that had taken place since the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland.⁴⁰

Political instability in the Dominican Republic, however, stifled plans for an ecumenical missionary effort in 1911.⁴¹ It was not until 1916, when the United States invaded the Dominican Republic and established a military occupation, that American missionaries in Puerto Rico renewed their

39. Philo W. Drury and N.H. Huffman, "Occupancy of Santo Domingo by Evangelical Missions," *Latin American General Records* 1911-1974, The Burke Library, Columbia University, New York, NY.

40. Samuel Guy Inman, *Christian Cooperation in Latin America* (Madison Avenue: Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, 1917), 32.

41. Two months after Drury and Huffman made their report, the Dominican president, Ramón Cáceres, was assassinated and the period of political stability that lasted during his presidency abruptly ended. The wars that ensued led white American churches to postpone their plans for missions.

interest in the Dominican Republic. That year, the board of the EUPR voted to raise the question of Dominican missions to various church boards in the United States.⁴² At the same time, the Foreign Missionary Conference of North America organized an ecumenical conference in Panama that examined Latin American and Caribbean countries in order to prepare for large-scale missionary work.⁴³ A year later, the American ecumenical organization, the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA) was formed. The cooperation between the CCLA and the EUPR led to the founding of the BCWSD four years later during the U.S. Occupation (1916-1924).⁴⁴ In 1922, the BCWSD established the Dominican Evangelical Church (IED), the first ecumenical Protestant church in Latin America. In the lead up to the IED's founding, Drury and Huffman's 1911 report was reread and cited in additional surveys of the island. The evangelical plan that they had developed had finally come to fruition.

Unlike the AME Church, the IED was connected to a movement of American missions to Latin America and thus reflected white Americans' vision of the region's religious needs. This meant that Americans' conceptualization of the Dominican Republic as a Latin nation impacted its plans, particularly the employment of Puerto Rican ministers as the first IED pastors. The first three Puerto Ricans who ministered in the IED church, Rafael R. Rodríguez, Alberto Martínez, and José Espada Marrero worked under the auspices of the BCWSD and the field superintendent, Nathan H. Huffman. Backed with money from wealthy denominations in the United States, these leaders implemented a four-point plan to impact Dominican society through evangelism, education, and medical and social work.⁴⁵

The first decade (1922-1932) of the IED, can be described as a period of adaptation and organization. During the first year, the IED established itself in Santo Domingo, San Pedro de Macoris, and San Cristobal. It ran schools at each of these places, albeit to a varying degree of success. It also began a bookstore and hospital, nurse training school, and baby

42. Odell, *It Came to Pass*, 148.

43. All of these organizations and conferences were related. The Foreign Missionary Conference of North America was held in New York and led to another meeting, the Panama Conference, in 1916. The Puerto Rico Regional Conference developed from the Panama Conference and was also held in 1916. At this conference the Evangelical Union of Puerto Rico, a body that consisted of nine denominations working in Puerto Rico at the time, was formally established. The CCLA was then established in 1917.

44. "Outline of Cooperative Work in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo," *Records of the Foreign Missionary Society of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ*, Folder 2279-5-6:07, The General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, Madison, New Jersey [hereafter GCAH].

45. "Report of Field Superintendent for the Fiscal year 1922-1923," *Records of the Foreign Missionary Society of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ*, Folder 2279-5-6:02, GCAH.

clinic in the capital. These institutions, however, were just beginning to form. The hospital, for example, did not yet have a building and had to reduce its operations until more money could be invested in it.⁴⁶ Similarly, membership was just beginning to grow. In October 1923, total membership in the IED numbered only 345, with the largest congregation in San Pedro.⁴⁷ Over the course of the 1920s, the IED bought a new hospital building and invested more money in its social work. It moreover received additional missionaries from Puerto Rico, including Miguel Limardo who became an IED pastor in 1924. At the same time, the BCWSD sent Dominican converts to Puerto Rico and Cuba for seminary training. The first students to study abroad were Andrés Séptimo Pérez, Rafael Puellos, Abelardo Pérez, José Gallo Peñalba, and Ramón Prat.⁴⁸ By 1928, the membership rose to 417, and the church was continuing its social, educational and medical work.⁴⁹ In 1930, the BCWSD set out to rebuild the hospital after it was destroyed by the hurricane San Zenón. The next year, Miguel Limardo founded the church's newspaper, *Nuestro Amigo*. Membership continued to increase incrementally in the 1930s, and the denomination benefited from the 1931-1933 incorporation of the Wesleyan churches in Samaná, Sánchez, and Puerto Plata.

During the dictatorship of Trujillo (1930-1961), the IED became even more integrated into Dominican society. During this time, the church continued with its social work. The hospital, which was renamed *Hospital Internacional*, became one of the premier medical institutions in the country. IED schools educated hundreds of students, and Dominican professionals and members of the intellectual class frequented the bookstore, which brought in thousands of dollars yearly. The church also ran a radio hour and published *Nuestro Amigo* consistently during this time. Three American superintendents, Barney N. Morgan (1929-1949), Richard E. Johnson (1949-1955), and Maurice Daily (1955-1965) served as leaders over the work during the *Trujillato*. Additionally, prominent leaders of the IED, including Julio Postigo, got their start in the church during this period. Although members of the evangelical church were at times persecuted for their beliefs, they consistently served their local communities. Membership in the church continued to grow at a slow,

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid. This was up from 209 the previous year. See "Acta Primera Asamblea General IED," Santo Domingo, January 16-17, 1923, National Offices of the Dominican Evangelical Church.

48. "Report of Field Superintendent for the Fiscal year 1923-1924," *Records of the Foreign Missionary Society of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ*, Folder 2279-5-6.02, GCAH.

49. See "Actas de la Séptima Asamblea General de la Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana," Barahona, January 20-24, 1929, National Offices of the Dominican Evangelical Church.

but steady rate; in 1960 there were 2959 members. The incorporation of the Moravian church boosted growth that year.⁵⁰

The connection between the IED and the BCWSD guaranteed that the IED was well funded and supported with trained personnel. The close relationship between these two institutions, however, began to change during the 1960s and 1980s. After the American field superintendent Maurice Daily resigned in 1965, the BCWSD decided that a native leader should take over the role of field superintendent. Luís Thomas was then elected as the first executive secretary of the IED and served from 1965 to 1969.⁵¹ The nature of the board's role to the IED also transformed, and by 1969 the BCWSD's meeting minutes stated that, "the BCWSD is not an operating body in the Dominican Republic but rather an advisory and consultative body."⁵² To this end, in 1970 the BCWSD changed its name from the Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo to the Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church (COCODEC).⁵³ It also began to quickly disinvest in the country. Besides transferring its properties to the IED, in 1970 it projected a budgetary reduction for the IED from \$105,500 in 1971 to \$103,650 in 1972.⁵⁴ By October 1971, the IED asked for a guarantee of yearly funds, but COCODEC replied that, "the cooperating churches have no such 'guarantee' from their constituents to back any such guarantee. It was agreed that a tentative indication would be made in the Spring meeting of 1972 for the years 1973 and 1974."⁵⁵ In 1974, the budget was reduced to \$57,650, and in 1975 it was further reduced to \$53,700; greater reductions took place throughout the 1980s.⁵⁶

These drastic changes produced a crisis within the church. By 1983 COCODEC reported that the IED, "feels isolated from the churches in the United States; that COCODEC impedes any intimate relationship with these churches; and that the North American churches are not familiar

50. For information on the field secretaries see Hernán González Roca, *Horizontes de Esperanza. Historia de La Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Letra Gráfica, 2006), vol. 1, 121–51. For statistics see "Crecimiento de la membresía de la Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana en 12 años," *Nuestro Amigo*, 339 (July 1969) 10.

51. Roca, *Horizontes de Esperanza*, vol. 2, 191–199.

52. "Minutes of Special Meeting Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo, Monday October 6, 1969," World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Folder 2539-6-1:06, GCAH.

53. "Minutes of Special Meeting Board for Christian Work in Santo Domingo Monday, January 19, 1970," World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Folder 2539-6-1:07, GCAH.

54. "Minutes of the Meeting of the Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church, October 4–5, 1970," World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Folder 2539-6-1:07, GCAH.

55. "Minutes: Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church," World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Folder 2539-6-1:07, GCAH.

56. See "Minutes: Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church, October 4, 1973," and "Minutes: Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church, October 30, 1974" in World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Folder 2539-6-1:07, GCAH.

with the Dominican Evangelical Church even though there is a great need for it.”⁵⁷ Proposals were drawn up for ways to improve the relationship. At the same time, the Dominican leadership began to make changes as well. Lacking the money to send pastors abroad, in 1978 they formed a theological school for the training of pastors.⁵⁸ They additionally formed development and planning committees that developed strategies for the future.⁵⁹ While COCODEC eventually dissolved, these committees, along with the executive branch of the church’s government, have led the IED to the present moment.

In 2014, the IED Church reported 5,286 members in plain communion, and 11,433 regular attendees nation-wide. The denomination is divided into six regions: central, south central, east, northeast, south, and north. The two largest regions are the central (Santo Domingo, D.N.) and south (area of Barahona), with 1,508 and 1065 members respectively. Full membership in the other regions range from 609 to 791. There are three types of congregations in the IED church: organized churches, chapels, and preaching points. In 2014, there were 46 organized churches, 57 chapels and 56 preaching points. The pastors and leaders of these congregations report to the national office located in Santo Domingo. The Executive Secretary, Rev. Miguel Angel Cancú, is the chief administrative officer of the church, and leads the denomination along with an executive board of elected officials. The IED church maintains various schools across the Dominican Republic, and continues social programs at the local level.⁶⁰

The IED’s relationships with American institutions today are very different than what they were in the 1920s when the denomination was founded. Although the BCWSD and COCODEC no longer exist, the IED can apply for funds directly to the Presbyterian and United Methodists denominations in the United States. At the same time, these denominations—including the Korean Presbyterian Church—have sent various missionaries to the Dominican Republic. These missionaries live and work in the capital, Barahona, and various places in the north and south of the island. The IED also receives missionary volunteers who travel to the island to complete short-term missionary projects. In addition,

57. “Minutes: Council for Cooperation with the Dominican Evangelical Church (COCODEC), September 29–30, 1983,” in *World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries*, Folder 2539-7-5:02, GCAH.

58. Samuel Grano de Oro, “Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana Casi 80 Años Después: Realidades y Perspectivas,” Unpublished manuscript.

59. Roca, *Horizontes de Esperanza. Historia de La Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana*, 333–34.

60. “Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana: Informe de Ejecución Año 2014” (Santo Domingo: Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana, 2015), 65–77.

the IED partners with various international organizations, including Concilio de Misión Caribeño Norteamericano (CANACOM), Alianza de Iglesias Presbiterianas para América Latina (AIPRAL), Consejo de Iglesias Metodistas para América Latina (CIEMAL), Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI), and Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI). These associations connect the IED to world organizations, and enable the denomination's leaders to build transnational affiliations.⁶¹

61. *Ibid.*, 10.

V. The Evangelical Religious Sphere in 2014-2015

While the AME and IED denominations each have unique histories that have directed their trajectories in the Dominican Republic, they also both exist within an evangelical environment in which they represent a minority population as historical churches. The evangelical community in the Dominican Republic has grown exponentially since the 1980s, yet it is only within the last two decades that evangelical Christians have formed a political voice and gained visibility within Dominican politics, media, and society at large. In order to understand how the changing religious sphere in the Dominican Republic has affected the AME and IED denominations and their transnational relationships with the United States, it is important to examine current dynamics within the evangelical community—especially the ways that this community relates to the United States, builds ties with American international groups, and promotes nationalist conservative politics within the Dominican Republic.

4.1. The Emergence of the Evangelical Community

The author arrived in the Dominican Republic in November 2014, during a moment of intense political campaigning within the evangelical and Catholic religious communities. Social issues—particularly gay marriage and abortion rights—dominated the public sphere, and national evangelical organizations were making their voices heard. The high degree of political organization among Dominican evangelicals reflected a trend that had been growing since the late 1980s, and it was evident immediately that Protestants were no longer an apolitical group concerned only with the spiritual realm.

The journalist Bienvenido Álvarez Vega has researched and documented the growth of evangelical activism and political organization in the Dominican Republic over the last three decades. According to Álvarez Vega, evangelicals lacked political influence prior to the late 1980s. Although evangelicals had historically used the radio to propagate their activities, they were not active in the press and did not appear on television.⁶² Changes began to take place during the 1990 election, when the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD) candidate José Francisco Peña Gómez included evangelical churches in his plans for a shared

62. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega, “Comunidad evangélica y opinión pública” (Segunda Expo Feria del Libro Cristiano, Santo Domingo, October 16, 2003), 9.

government. Consequently, other politicians began to solicit the support from the evangelical community. Evangelical leaders began to realize their political potential and organized the evangelical community on a national level. Ever since the 1990s, evangelical leaders have participated in national debates and been appointed to government positions.⁶³

The rise of neo-Pentecostal churches over the last three decades and the growth of evangelical Christianity among students, professionals, and the middle class have also instigated increased political and social visibility of evangelicals. Álvarez Vega estimates that around 40 percent of evangelical churches in the Dominican Republic are neo-Pentecostal churches. These denominations originated in traditional Pentecostal churches, but have broken away from the rules and norms of the traditional denominations. Álvarez Vega further explains that the growth of these churches “expresses a crisis seen in the historic churches and the [traditional] Pentecostal churches insofar as their members begin as professional college students and then later become professionals.”⁶⁴ As more middle class Dominicans convert to Protestantism, they complain that “the level of teaching they receive [in their churches] does not match their professional capacity.”⁶⁵ Consequently, Professionals have left the traditional churches and have created spaces where they can combine traditional Protestant ideas and professional practices in organizing and marketing. Popular among the middle-class, well marketed and easily able to adapt to culture, neo-Pentecostal churches have grown exponentially in the country. In return, they have made the Protestant/evangelical community a more visible part of Dominican society.

With its increased visibility in the public sector, it is now possible to speak of an “iglesia evangélica” or a “Dominican evangelical community,” although it is not possible to easily identify who exactly leads this community. Various organizations and events evidence a high degree of ecumenical cooperation. They include national organizations like the *Confraternidad Evangélica Dominicana* (CONEDO) and the *Consejo Dominicano de Unidad Evangélica* (CODUE); the 2011 *Consulta de Líderes Cristianos* sponsored by World Vision; conventions with invited

63. Álvarez Vega lists a number of evangelicals who were included in government. Rev. Manuel Estrella was the evangelical representative on a Presidential Commission for State Reforms and Modernization in 1997. Braulio Portes was part of the group of observers for the bidding process involving the country's airports. Rev. Ezequiel Molina Rosario was member of the organizing committee of *Diálogo Nacional*. In 2001 Rev. Manuel Estrella and Braulio Portes were appointed to the Constitutional Reform Committee, and in 2003 both CODUE and CONEDO became part of the national development planning committee. *Ibid.*, 10.

64. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, August 17, 2015.

65. *Ibid.*

international preachers; musical concerts and revivals, such as those by famous converts such as Juan Luis Guerra and Boruga; the yearly Batalla de la Fe rally; and the Universidad Nacional Evangélica. The evangelicals who make up these organizations and attend these events understand that they represent various denominations, but they also perceive themselves as part of a broader Dominican, non-Catholic Christian community. While the existence of multiple national groups means that there is no one leader for this community, in coalescing around such events and organizations, evangelicals are now an undeniable influential part of Dominican society. Figure 3 written by Bienvenido Álvarez Vega and reprinted here with permission, provides further evidence of the cohesion of the Dominican evangelical community and its integration into society.⁶⁶

1	The Evangelical Church is now a visible church
2	It has access to the media
3	Civil society takes the evangelical church into account when developing plans and programs aimed at improving the public and personal quality of life for Dominicans.
4	The evangelical church now has formal representation within various government agencies, including the important Ministries of Public Health, Youth and Education.
5	The evangelical church has in the past and continues to participate in major national commissions integrated in the country since 1996, for constitutional and judicial reform as well as reform of state-run businesses.
6	The evangelical church has a meaningful presence in the country through medical centers, schools, nursing homes, centers that promote family values, radio stations, internet sites, libraries, a university, orphanages, community centers and other services
7	The evangelical church has non-governmental organizations that work on its behalf, providing different services in geographic locations. To cite several: Church Social Services, Floresta, <i>Agua Viviente</i> [Living Water], World Vision, Dominican Alfalit, Aspire, Compassion.
8	There are more and more well-known Evangelical Christians writing books that are being accepted in the publishing market. These include writers such as Susana Sánchez, Rafael Dunker, Wilfredo Mañón, Telesforo Isaac, Samuel Santana, Adalberto Martínez (Deputy Education Minister).
9	In recent years, there have been outstanding figures in the area of popular and classical music and humor that have raised the banner for evangelical churches through their conversions and their church membership. Such well-known cases worth mentioning are Ramón Orlando, Juan Luis Guerra and Felipe Polanco (Boruga).
10	Christian musical productions are widely promoted in the media, in record stores and super-markets. Christian artists receive annual awards for their performances.
11	According to Americas Barometer Survey for 2008, evangelical churches are ranked third among institutions that enjoy people's trust, only to be exceeded by the media and the Catholic Church. Institutions that trail evangelical churches in terms of inspiring trust and confidence include the Armed Services, President of the Republic, the National Electoral Board, the Supreme Court, the National Congress, the Justice System, the police and political parties.

Figure 3: Evidence of Social Integration of the Dominican Evangelical Community according to Lic. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega, 2011.

66. Álvarez Vega, "La incidencia pública de la iglesia," 36–37.

Although the evangelical community has no single voice, the increased political and social relevance of the evangelicals has meant that certain voices have emerged louder than others. In 2014-2015, the Consejo Dominicano de Unidad Evangélica (CODUE) was perhaps the single most active and vocal organizations in Dominican politics and media. Its public discourses were framed in nationalist terms, with evangelicals posed against perceived demonic, liberal threats from abroad, particularly the United States. As CODUE president Fidel Lorenzo Merán has written.

“Anticipating that the intention of the enemy is to invade us with ideologies that do not match our values expressed in the interest of legislative changes by foreign impositions, we work to motivate a Christian leadership with political vocation in order to occupy congressional posts committed to evangelical values.”⁶⁷

Understanding present politics as a fight against good versus evil, Lorenzo Merán and other CODUE representatives have met with the Dominican President Danilo Medina. They have hosted events such as public marches and the 2014 “Reestablishing Our Family and Social Values.” Conference. They have also interviewed with dozens of T.V. stations and newspapers.⁶⁸ Such political participation further demonstrates the ability of the evangelical community to insert itself into Dominican society. It also indicates a reaction to the country’s complicated relationship with the United States, American culture wars, and Dominican evangelicals’ attempts to make sense of their place within a globalized religious sphere.

4.2. International Ties within the Evangelical Community

As the Dominican evangelical community has increased in size and political importance, so too have its relationship with other countries, particularly the United States. These relationships are crucial to the understanding of the Dominican evangelical context for at least three reasons. First, as the periodization model demonstrates, many Dominican denominations (including the largest Pentecostal groups) derive from American or Puerto Rican churches. Even though most Dominican churches are autonomous, many of them have maintained links to these

67. CODUE, “Gestión de consolidación y liderazgo nacional: Memorias 2012-2014” (Santo Domingo: Consejo Dominicana de Unidad Evangélica (CODUE), 2015) 4.

68. *Ibid.*, 9–12.

origins. Second, the decline of missionary boards in the United States and the rise of ecumenical missions organizations, such as World Vision and Samaritan's Purse, have contributed to the prestige of national groups such as CODUE that are in contact with these organizations. Third, the right wing politics of American evangelicals correspond with Dominican conservative evangelical politics, leading to an interchange of conservative evangelical discourse between the two countries that Dominicans interpret within their own context. As globalization brings Dominican evangelicals in contact with other evangelicals across the world, the evangelical community's ties to the United States and conservative politics continue to influence the ways that Dominicans both seek out international cooperation and perceive foreign threats (e.g. liberal values from the secular sectors of the United States).

In the last century, the links between Dominican and American Protestant churches were clear since Dominicans depended upon the financial, doctrinal, and even organizational leadership of American denominations. Today, however, it is more difficult to determine all of the ways that American and Dominican evangelicals are connected. For historic churches and traditional Pentecostal denominations, the ties to American denominations remain insofar as American missionaries still visit the island, theological literature is often still produced in the United States, and Americans still support Dominican churches with financial donations. Yet, since most Dominican evangelical institutions are autonomous, Dominicans head the denominations. They also determine the use of finances and write and interpret denominational literature within their own contexts. Understanding how American evangelical culture influences Dominican evangelical culture is thus a difficult question.

This question is made even more difficult when considering neo-Pentecostal groups, whose ties to the United States are less obvious than from those of historic churches and traditional Pentecostal denominations. Such churches ties take place on the church-to-church level. Additionally, ties to Dominicans who have formed churches in the United States are also prevalent, and such connections are difficult to track. Fidel Lorenzo, for example, estimates that, "In general, the majority of independent churches are sponsored by a North American church."⁶⁹ Although more sociological research is needed to confirm this

69. Fidel Lorenzo Merán, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, April 14, 2015.

statement, Lorenzo's comments indicate that American churches may have a greater financial (and perhaps cultural) impact on Dominican society than they did a century ago.

Tracking cooperation between American and Dominican organizations at the national level is an easier task. To this end, CODUE is a prime example. According to CODUE's president, Fidel Lorenzo Merán, plans for CODUE began in 1990 when the U.S.-based organization World Vision initiated conferences for evangelical pastors ("congresos pastorales" or "Conpas"). These conferences were to, "challenge and focus the leadership in the work of reaching the nation."⁷⁰ In the Dominican Republic, World Vision completed a national evangelical survey in which almost 3,000 churches participated. Then in 1991, pastors who had participated in the conferences began to think of ways to unify the evangelical churches, and CODUE was created. Another national group, the *Confraternidad Evangélica Dominicana* (CONEDO) already existed in that moment, and it initially became part of CODUE (they later separated again). In 1992 they formalized CODUE as an organization and in 1993 CODUE held its first national assembly. According to Lorenzo, "CODUE is the most democratic evangelical institution in the Dominican Republic," because it has held yearly conferences for over twenty years and elects its leaders by direct representation.⁷¹ Conceived as an autonomous national institution, CODUE develops its own policies and initiatives. Yet, it also continues to receive American financial support for its endeavors. Thus, international ties to the United States remain strong even for emerging national evangelical organizations.

4.3. Historical Racism, American Evangelical Culture, and the Dominican Social Context

American evangelical organizations' support of Dominican groups has led to the exchange of conservative evangelical discourse that perpetuates the idea that evangelicals are participating in a world-wide battle against good and evil. This discourse, however, does not take into account the ways that conservative evangelical politics have been racialized in the United States. Nevertheless, racial politics have played a critical role in the development of American evangelical Christianity and U.S. evangelical missions abroad. Thus, such politics continue to influence the transnational relationships between U.S. and Dominican Protestant institutions.

⁷⁰. Ibid.

⁷¹. Ibid.

It is well known among both Americans and Dominicans that slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynching and racial discrimination have shaped American society. Less understood, however, is how the majority of white American evangelicals supported racist policies throughout the twentieth century and even opposed the Civil Rights movement. As American scholars Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith have stated, "Some whites did indeed participate in Civil Rights marches, freedom rides, and the like, but they were rarely evangelical Christians...Southern evangelicals generally sided against black evangelicals on the segregation issue, and northern evangelicals seemed more preoccupied with other issues."⁷² The historical attitudes of American evangelicals towards racial issues in the United States have made it difficult for African Americans to align with conservative evangelicals although black evangelicals may agree with white conservatives on matters of faith.

This division continues to matter in the contemporary context. When it comes to historical and structural racism, conservative white evangelical churches tend to emphasize racial reconciliation on a personal level. This emphasis does little to deconstruct the ways that racism works on a systemic level, "leaving the larger racialized social structures, institutions, and culture intact."⁷³ Thus, it is possible for many evangelicals to claim to believe in racial equality even while they continue to actively support racist systems and institutions. American evangelicals' overwhelming support of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election is a prime example of this phenomenon. Their continued support of conservative politics in the United States, despite Trump's racist rhetoric and implicit support of white supremacists, means that American evangelicalism cannot escape its racialized history.

Considering the current racist undertones that pervade conservative evangelical modern discourse within the United States, it is reasonable to deduce that such politics have inevitably influenced American evangelical missions abroad. Within the Dominican Republic, however, American evangelical politics are not interpreted within a historical racialized context. This does not mean that race and racism are not issues within Dominican evangelical society but rather that conservative American evangelical groups have been the dominant voice among American

72. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46. See also Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred After Brown," *Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004): 119-144.

73. *Ibid.*, 52.

missionaries in the Dominican Republic. In other words, alternative American evangelical voices do not exist—or at least not visibly on the national level. When asked about international influences in the Dominican sphere, Álvarez Vega stated, “I would say that there is very little African influence in the evangelical world... you can count on one hand the African American missionaries and evangelists who have come here. Ninety-nine percent are white. So, of course, it is they who have the influence.”⁷⁴ Despite the fact that Pentecostalism began in the U.S. as a movement led by a black preacher and the fact that, “one thinks that [evangelism under Afro-cultural influence] connects more with our autochthony and with our African heritage,” the evangelical movement in the Dominican Republic has almost always been a white American conservative endeavor.⁷⁵

Consequently, ties to U.S. institutions are based on conservative interpretations of the Bible, which provide a basis for mutual agreement between white Americans and Dominican evangelicals. In the absence of diverse opinions about evangelical culture in the United States, Dominicans have come to interpret U.S. politics and secular diplomacy through the eyes of white conservatives such as Rev. Michael Johnson, who in October 2014 declared that in the United States, “biblical morality reigned in the political and social context between 1770-1940. Then, from 1940 to 1960, morality without the Bible was advocated... from 1960 to 1980, a new era emerged wherein immorality prevailed.”⁷⁶ This depiction of moral decay is common among American conservatives, and the belief that the United States has lost its religious heritage has spread among Dominican evangelicals—particularly after the legalization of gay marriage in 2015. Yet, to many Americans, Johnson’s periodization of America’s declining morality would seem intrinsically flawed. Not only did slavery exist for most of the 1770-1940 period, but the period 1940-1960 also marked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement—a movement that arguably led to increased “morality” within American society. The void in critical interpretations of American history and the role that the evangelical church played in perpetuating inequality within American society makes it easy for Dominicans to overlook such inconsistencies and interpret this periodization within a Dominican context where high rates of violence and governmental corruption in recent years have led to a parallel interpretations of moral decline.

74. Bienvenido Álvarez Vega, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, August 17, 2015.

75. Ibid.

76. “Abogado afirma ‘moral y valores religiosos EEUU han sido desintegrados,’” *Evidencias*, Noviembre 2014, p. 21.

While the politics of the Dominican evangelical community cannot be characterized merely as an extension or mimic of American conservative evangelism, it is important to note that the shared conservative values lead to similar political outlooks as Dominican evangelicals interpret their own society. Thus, evangelical groups have propagated a nationalist discourse and have supported conservative politics within Dominican society—including the controversial migration law 168-13.⁷⁷ Like evangelicals in the United States, they have tended to ignore the racialized elements of their conservative political stance. Instead, they have taken a nationalist stance and have attempted to “defend Dominican values” against perceived foreign threats. As scholar Brendan Jamal Thornton has stated, “it is not Pentecostal Christianity’s difference from the local...so much as its affinity to the religion of the state that makes its appeal enduring and, as a matter of course, legitimate in local terms.”⁷⁸ The transnational context thus makes Dominican evangelical organizations more legitimate in the public eye by providing funds and a global connection to the perceived fight against demonic/foreign influences within the Dominican Republic and the world at large.

International influences continue to matter within the Dominican evangelical context, and in today’s globalized society Dominicans are increasingly cooperating with other non-American evangelical organizations outside of the Dominican Republic—especially in Latin America and South Korea. Conservative politics do not instigate all such relationships, but they do factor into the ways that Dominican evangelical leaders pursue such ties and understand their work as part of a broader evangelical Christian community not just limited to the Dominican Republic or the United States. Dominican evangelicals thus live in a context in which the local can be—and often is—connected to the international, and international events are interpreted within local understandings of religion and politics.

77. In September 2013, the Dominican Constitutional Court issued this ruling which restricts Dominican citizenship to those born of Dominican parents or legal residents. This ruling was made retroactive to the year 1929.

78. Thornton, *Negotiating Respect*, 33.

VI. Historical Church Reactions to the Evangelical Context and Transnational Relations

The changing religious landscape in the Dominican Republic has inevitably impacted the AME and IED denominations. As leaders within these denominations have adapted to the growing visibility of the evangelical community, they have considered ways to make their institutions more “Dominican” in style and form—despite their strong historic and current ties to the United States. The transition has not always produced successful results, but leaders also express optimism in the cultural and structural processes of change that they have instituted in order to help their denominations grow in the Dominican Republic. The historical and continued transnational relationships to the United States continue to factor into these processes. At times, such relationships can produce ideological conflict and limitations within both the AME and IED Churches. At other times, they are sources of support. Navigating these relationships has become an integral part of the *dominicanization* process.

5.1. “Dominicanizing” the Historical Churches through Culture

As the broader Dominican evangelical community has emerged and gained influence in the political realm, the AME and IED denominations have had to adjust. Transformations have been both cultural and structural in form, and have led to both growth and controversy within the two institutions. In general, cultural adjustments have been more readily achieved than changes to more entrenched structural problems.

Cultural changes are most apparent in the form of worship during church services. Local churches within both the AME and IED churches have adopted more charismatic services, especially in their style of worship. As Rev. Margarito Rodríguez, the pastor of New Bethel AME and the national secretary, explained, “we have made some changes in liturgy in terms of worship, and that has attracted many people because [before] they saw the church as very tranquil, very Methodist. We’ve tried to introduce a bit of Caribbean flavor, a livelier atmosphere.”⁷⁹ He further explained that such transformations have to do with the music. “I’m referring to the form of worship. It is a bit livelier, more dynamic than

79. Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

what we are accustomed to...but we always maintain order in the church,” Rodríguez stated.⁸⁰ Rev. Miguel Ángel Cancú offered similar thoughts in regards to the IED “There is always influence. There are churches that are dynamic and there will always be people who say they are Pentecostal ... there are other churches that are very passive, but then they’re losing membership. One has to keep up with the times ... we are surrounded by many different churches.”⁸¹ Like Rodríguez, Cancú stressed that changes have to happen “in an orderly fashion, without changing the essence.”⁸² In other words, while worship styles have changed in order to attract members, the official theology and beliefs of the two denominations have not changed. “Although the [IED] has churches that appear to be Pentecostal,” said Cancú, “they are still viewed as evangelical by the [IED] movement.”⁸³

While it is true that local churches remain within the historical denominations, it is also apparent that Pentecostal influences as well as understanding of denominational theology varies by region and class. In the IED church, more liturgical forms of worship generally take place in the city centers, while more Pentecostal styles take place in the countryside. A similar pattern emerges in the AME Church. Although all AME churches in the Dominican Republic are charismatic in their style of worship, members in the rural northeast district tend to adhere to stricter social codes. Social expectations for Christians in the northeastern district are thus more restrictive, especially for women, who are expected to wear skirts or dresses and not use make-up and jewelry. Although the rigidity of such social norms is waning, these practices still mark a difference between the two districts. Advocating and even enforcing restrictions such as dress codes are not part of the AME doctrine, but these changes have enabled congregations to effectively compete with other evangelical denominations.

Other cultural changes are perhaps less obvious, especially when it comes to racial politics. As a denomination that has always stood for racial equality in the United States, the AME Church has been remarkably silent regarding racial issues in the Dominican Republic. When asked if being part of a historically black church made a difference, Rev. Rodríguez hesitated before answering. He then said:

80. Ibid.

81. Miguel Ángel Cancú, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, July 21, 2015.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

“In the beginning, maybe yes, but not anymore. I’ll tell you that in the beginning it did matter because, since our church originated with the migration, the same customs and culture of the immigrants were imposed on the church. That is no longer the case. Today, we are part of everything, and you cannot tell the difference because today we live according to the culture of our country. There are now things from our customs, the customs of our fathers, of which we are not even aware.”⁸⁴

In his response, Rodríguez stressed that Dominican culture predominates in the AME Church. According to Rodríguez, the concerns of Dominican African Methodists not the same as they are among African Methodists in the U.S. Yet, his words also imply that a self-conscious black identity is solely an American “custom.” Thus, black consciousness is relegated to the area of foreign culture. This framework for thinking about race is perhaps why the Black Lives Matter movement—a protest that has been backed by the AME Church in the United States—has not taken hold in AME churches in the Dominican Republic. This does not mean that there is no racism in the Dominican Republic, or that AME members do not identify as black, but that the broader Dominican culture guides ways of thinking about race within the church. Like the broader Dominican evangelical community, the AME church tends to discuss social themes other than race—particularly the family, violence within society, and poverty.

The same could be said of the IED church, which did not originate in a self-conscious black church, but where racial discrimination is rarely discussed. When asked about how racial dynamics in the IED church worked, Lic. José Peguero, the Director of Church Planning, stated that in the past the American leaders of the BCWSD did not train black pastors. “Most of the pastors who were sent to school outside of the country were white...The black pastors talked about not having been picked to receive education,” he explained.⁸⁵ People generally do not speak of this practice as a racial issue because the darker-skinned pastors did not have the educational background that would qualify them for schooling. Yet, even this fact underscores that racial discrimination was structural. In the IED church, the situation began to change when Dominicans took over leadership and the BCWSD stopped funding pastors’ seminary training abroad. The theological institution that the IED began

84. Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

85. Author’s research notes, December 2015.

with the Episcopal Church opened access to theological education for pastors who traditionally were not supported with scholarships to travel to Puerto Rico or Cuba. The successes of this institution, however, are not discussed in racialized terms. Like in the AME Church, the ways that racial discrimination has impacted the IED is seldom ever mentioned.

As part of the greater broader Dominican evangelical society, IED and AME leaders generally support the conservative agenda of national groups such as CODUE, although neither institution is a participating member of CODUE. For example, Rev. Rodríguez stated that when he teaches about the family, he always teaches a traditional model. “I believe deeply in the mother as the caregiver and the man as the provider. I teach that. Because I believe that is the way to raise healthy children, with the father as provider, conforming to the old-fashion model,” he said.⁸⁶ Rodríguez then clarified that he did not mean that the mother should be “a slave in the house,” but that she be “well centered in terms of caring for the children.”⁸⁷ Rev. Cancú also expressed support for conservative views of marriage when he informed me of his phone call with the new Presbyterian executive secretary for Latin America regarding homosexuality and changes within the U.S. Presbyterian church. According to Cancú, the Presbyterian leader said, “I would never send a gay person to this country because it would be in conflict [with the perspective of the IED].”⁸⁸ While both Rodríguez and Cancú’s statements are unsurprising insofar as they align with traditional views of the Bible, they also reflect how current issues that are being debated at the national level come to the fore in historical denominations. In other words, conservative values are yet one more way that Dominicans in the IED and AME churches participate in a broader Dominican evangelical culture.

As leaders within both institutions have adapted to the societies in which they live and the increased visibility of the Protestant-evangelical church at the national level, they have also stressed that their message is the same as all other evangelical churches, despite the different denominations that exist. When asked about the AME church’s black heritage, for example, Rev. Rodríguez stated that there was a time when some members of the church did not want to say the church’s name because they believed that the people would reject them because of

86. Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

87. Ibid.

88. Miguel Angel Cancú, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, July 21, 2015.

the word “African” in the title, but this has changed. “As we have been training and learning more,” he stated, “we have realized that [the name] does not limit our growth, nor does it impede anything. We belong to a congregation, period. After all, we do not preach the denomination, but rather, Jesus Christ.”⁸⁹ The overarching evangelical-Christian message of the church is what makes both the AME and IED denominations part of the larger Dominican evangelical community. Limitations to these historical churches’ growth lie not in their cultural differences, but in structural factors that are more difficult to change and adapt within Dominican society.

5.2. AME and IED Structural Limitations

Over the past three decades, AME and IED church leaders have faced organizational challenges because their denominational structures are based on American models. These challenges—as well as issues involving current ties to entities in the United States—are distinct within each denomination. While in the AME Church leaders must figure out how to implement and modify a foreign discipline within Dominican society while receiving little to no financial support from the United States, leaders of the IED must agree on changes to their own doctrines while receiving various forms of foreign support. Thus, the historical and continued transnational relationships to the United States continue to impact the current operations of historical churches, making it difficult to enact structural change.

In the AME Church, leaders are governed by the discipline of the church, which is revised every four years at the General Conference held in the United States. National leaders such as Rev. Rodríguez and the national lay president, Dr. Isabel Medina, expressed pride in the church’s doctrine and regulations. For example, when asked how he feels about giving yearly reports to the bishop, Rodríguez stated, “I feel it is correct that I have to give information at my job. I like the fact that I have to do a report.”⁹⁰ He explained that the process of giving reports to the bishop and financial reports to the congregation both protects the pastor from accusations and makes the congregation feel confident that money is being handled correctly. In another occasion, Rev. Rodríguez stated that, “in terms of interpreting the Bible, I notice a big difference [between the AME and the Pentecostal Churches]...I have yet to see

89. Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

90. Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

anything better that would make me want to change denominations.”⁹¹ He further explained that the AME Church uses the Methodist theology of John Wesley and relies on biblical principles that are not always applied in the same way in other denominations. For example, whereas some denominations punish parishioners openly from the pulpit and apply sanctions for sins, Rodríguez explained that in the AME Church he tries to handle matters more discreetly according to Biblical scriptures that focus on reconciliation.⁹² Dr. Isabel Medina also expressed pride in the denomination’s governance. “We have methods and we should keep them ...I like the church vestments, the rituals, for example. At the conferences I attend, I admire the Bishops’ procession, the respect, the hierarchy, I like all that,” she stated.⁹³ For many leaders in the AME Church, the sense of being part of a worldwide movement that promotes traditional biblical theology, pastoral accountability, and a hierarchical structure of governance is appealing. It not only imbues a sense of unity, but also provides a sense of healthy regulation and oversight against corruption.

Despite these benefits, however, the AME discipline can also cause problems for the Dominican AME congregations. The primary issue is that even though the AME Church consists of seven overseas districts, the discipline is written in English with an American context in mind. Moreover, in the AME Church, bishops are rotated every four years, and some bishops emphasize the discipline more than others. At one extreme, one bishop even tried to prohibit the translation of the AME discipline into Spanish version, so as not to have Dominicans “holding the discipline over their heads.”⁹⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, bishop Carolyn Tyler-Guidry not only demanded that the discipline be translated, but she also sent for it to be published and bound in the Dominican Republic. Any given bishop, however, may react differently. Moreover, since bishops are elected and may be replaced every four years, consistency is not guaranteed. Rodríguez stated that besides the two female bishops, Carolyn Tyler-Guidry and Sarah Frances Davis (who were appointed to the Dominican Republic from 2000-2016), he could remember only one other bishop who has served for more than one term.⁹⁵ Bishops also do not speak Spanish and are unfamiliar with how to best implement the discipline within Dominican society. Whereas one

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

93. Isabel Medina, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, January 4, 2015.

94. Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

95. Sara Davis passed away in 2014, and was replaced by Bishop John White, who was the bishop of the 16th episcopal district until 2016.

bishop may empower Dominican leaders to modify rules according to the Dominican context, another may demand strict adherence to rules. The lack of understanding of both language and context makes it hard for AME governance to work. Moreover, since the denomination does not regularly translate the discipline after every four years, the Dominican churches must either fund their own translation or verbally communicate the changes. Since they lack funds for the former, quadrennial changes to AME law are taught verbally, leaving space for additional error and renewing the cycle of cultural misunderstanding.

Like the AME Church, the IED denomination is also governed by doctrine and organizational rules that were first conceptualized by American church leaders (i.e. BCWSD). The church, however, has a distinct challenge from the AME denomination in that it must write and regulate its own discipline. In 2014-2015, the IED leadership was in the last processes of rewriting the doctrine of the church. When asked what motivated the rewriting of the doctrine, Rev. Cancú explained, "The last revision of the discipline was in 1987. We are talking thirty-three years since the discipline was reformed. In thirty-three years, the world has changed a lot, so has the country. The church itself has changed. There is a new generation now."⁹⁶ Thus, the purpose of the reform was to update the church's laws so that the church could operate effectively within the current Dominican context. Cancú explained some of the small updates that need to be made, like changing the name of the "Executive Secretary" to that of "bishop," which corresponds to the name given to administrative leaders in other denominations. More difficult changes included modifications required by Dominican law. As Cancú stated, "Even the Constitution of the Republic was modified in 2010. And there are many things that clash with our discipline. And, in agreement with the country and its regulations, we have to keep adjusting to the country's demands."⁹⁷ Such changes included the question of retirement plans and employee benefits, issues that have not formerly applied to churches. Other challenges included stating clearly the rules governing local churches, the function of the board of officials at the local church level, and the qualifications for the three types of congregations in the IED (i.e. preaching points, chapels, and organized church). These clarifications were not available in the prior version of the IED discipline.

⁹⁶. Miguel Angel Cancú, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, July 21, 2015.

⁹⁷. Ibid.

While the IED leaders have considered modifications for the expressed purpose of making changes to fit within Dominican society, the overarching question of how the structure of the church does or does not reflect Dominican culture has not been explored in depth. José Peguero, suggests that the IED church reflects Dominican society in that there are formal and informal structures within the church. The “formal” refers to what is written in rules and regulations, but informal interaction between people drives action both within the church as well as Dominican society at large. He explained that when the church’s directorate is elected formally and has to accept decisions in a formal way, this model “contradicts the historical, well-established style of running organizations [in the Dominican Republic],” which is driven by informal interactions.⁹⁸ While Peguero believes that a certain level of caudillismo governs all Dominican organizations, he also stated that, “some of the biggest problems of that clash between the formal and informal [is] the fact that [the IED] was formed by another culture. That is to say, it is the product of North American culture.”⁹⁹ Understanding exactly how the IED currently functions and writing rules to reflect such functioning is a long process that will not be solved by the hard work of rewriting the discipline alone.

Other issues arise when considering the IED’s current ties to the United States. Although there is a high degree of collaboration between the IED and international groups, there are also implicit questions about what to do with monetary donations and who should make such decisions. While everyone agrees that the process for accepting foreign donations should include a dialogue between both American and Dominicans working together, such processes do not always lead to the types of back-and-forth interaction that leaders—both Americans and Dominicans—believe would be ideal. “I think that is one of the biggest problems,” stated Peguero. He further explained: “Many times [missionaries] will begin a program that the church does not have ... Then when it is finished, the missionaries maintain all the control—not because they want to, but because the circumstances demand them to, because the church is not prepared [to take control] and is not in a position to continue with the program.”¹⁰⁰

98. José Peguero, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, July 24, 2015.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

These dynamics make it difficult to implement new ways of thinking about the American-Dominican relationship, such as creating projects that Dominican churches could implement on their own with limited help from abroad. The questions of how to maintain control over the direction of missionary operations and how to communicate local needs effectively to foreign leaders has been an ongoing challenge in the IED church.

A similar statement can be said of the AME Church, with the added complication that the Dominican conference does not receive financial help from the United States. Consequently, Dominican leaders have only been able to control the direction of the denomination in the Dominican Republic to a limited extent. This has meant that the denomination's potential for growth has been stifled. Dr. Medina lamented that the AME Church is not known in the country. "Publicity is very meager," she said, faulting the lack of financial investment. "Our pastors earn very little, our denomination is poor," she stated.¹⁰¹ Rodríguez also critiqued the way that denominational funds are divided. "Treatment in the allocation of funds is not balanced at the international level."¹⁰² While Rodríguez complimented the AME denomination for treating ministers equally at the General Conference and allocating travel funds for those who could not afford to attend, he stated that funds should be distributed more equally. With more funds, the AME denomination could develop more social projects on the island, adequately pay its pastors, and ensure the upkeep of church buildings. Leaders could also expand to new regions of the country.

Financial aid, however, would not solve all of the AME Church's structural challenges. Since the denomination has no centralized governing executive body in the Dominican Republic, certain decisions can only be made once a year when the American bishop hosts the annual conference (i.e. general assembly). At the annual conference, ministers offer their reports before the conference and vote about various local matters that arise, but the research needed to conduct a serious investigation on church extension, doctrine, and regulations—to formally adapt the discipline to fit within the Dominican society—cannot be conducted during the four-day meeting. Coupled with the fact that bishops are not familiar with the local language, customs, and laws, and therefore cannot always understand the needs of the people, the annual

¹⁰¹ Isabel Medina, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, January 4, 2015.

¹⁰² Margarito Rodríguez Jones, interviewed by author, Santo Domingo, November 18, 2014.

conference at times produces confusion. In the end, the absence of a Dominican-controlled executive body has made it extremely difficult for Dominican AME leaders to plan for the future and adapt the church's organization and structure to fit within Dominican society; it has also made the AME Church an anomaly among its peers.

While both IED and AME leaders have adapted to their local contexts in the Dominican Republic, their separate experiences in dealing with the legacy of American influence has affected their historical trajectories. In the contemporary moment, the AME denomination has remained a marginalized institution within Dominican society while the IED is recognized at the national level. Both institutions continue to redefine themselves in light of their historical American connections. Yet, whether or not these institutions will develop new ways of existing within Dominican society will depend on their ability to confront structural limitations and implement plans to overcome them.

V. Conclusion

This study has examined the history and current state of two historical Protestant denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Dominican Evangelical Church (IED). It has paid special attention to these denominations' connections to the United States, and has examined historical, racial, cultural, and structural factors that impacted these denominations in the Dominican Republic in 2014-2015. In the process, this paper ultimately demonstrates that AME and IED leaders have made adaptations within their denominations in order to adjust to the broader Dominican evangelical context. Structural limitations, however, have set them on separate trajectories.

The distinct histories and trajectories of the two denominations are apparent in the fact that although both denominations are integrated into Dominican society, the AME remains on the fringe of the Dominican evangelical community while the IED church does not. Within the AME Church historical neglect of the U.S. leadership towards the Dominican Republic has led to a high degree of cultural transfer from Pentecostal churches, which in turn has stimulated the substantial growth of the AME denomination over the last three decades. AME Churches are growing because the denomination has lacked strong episcopal oversight and pastors have adapted to their local contexts. At the same time, the structural relationship that binds the Dominican congregations to American congregations makes it difficult for AME Churches to enact further changes that would enable them to become nationally recognized. The IED represents an opposite case study. Unlike the AME, the IED is now autonomous and not bound by the rules of a foreign discipline. The IED, moreover, may still apply for grant funding from the U.S., a privilege that the AME Church has never had. Still, certain limitations arise. Since the 1970s the IED has had to navigate its financial relationship with the United States while also reinventing its denominational identity as a national Protestant church. While the IED remains much more visible and integrated into prominent sectors of Dominican society than the AME, it must also wrestle with important questions of organization, procedure, and method—questions that, for better or worse, are already defined in the American discipline of the AME Church.

As leaders within these two denominations continue to adapt to Dominican society in which they form a minority population within the growing Dominican evangelical community, they must also continue to confront challenges derived from their past and present connections to the United States. This is not an easy process. Yet, such confrontations may enable the AME and IED denominations to develop strategic plans to overcome structural limitations and continue their historical evangelical work in the Dominican Republic.

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Christina C. Davidson

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2014-2015 marked Dr. Davidson’s second collaboration with GFDD/FUNGLODE. In 2007, Dr. Davidson conducted research for the first time in the Dominican Republic as a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow. The fellowship funded her participation in the GFDD/FUNGLODE’s InterDom program, which sponsored her internship with the United Nations Institution for the Research and Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in Santo Domingo. In 2007, Dr. Davidson also studied abroad with CIEE-Santo Domingo. Her first experience in the Dominican Republic in 2007 inspired her to begin research on Dominican Protestantism and pursue a career as a professor of history.

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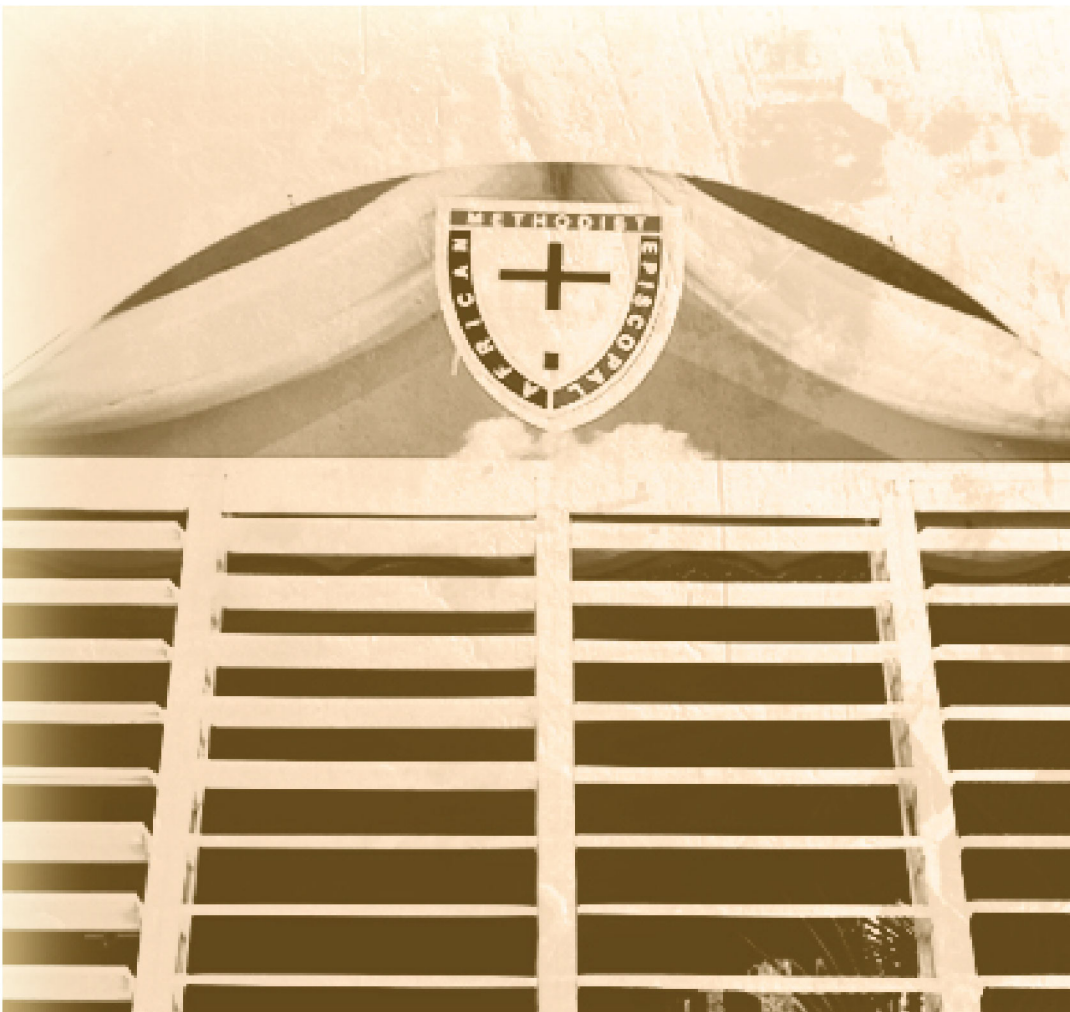
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Christina C. Davidson

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