In this chapter, I combine data gathered through participant observation, interviews, and archival and non-archival research of original documents, in order to inform an anthropological understanding of the history of Pentecostal churches in Honiara, Solomon Islands. The insights provided by this combination of data sources enable me to question earlier understandings of Pentecostal mushrooming as a result of missionary efforts from outside, and propose some interpretations of the uniqueness of conversion patterns among Solomon Islanders. Without downplaying the role of foreign influences (cf. Dundon 2011, 3; Robbins, Stewart, and Strathern 2001), I argue that the growth of Pentecostal denominations—rather than being analyzed solely as part of an already highly Christianized territory—should also be interpreted as an independent move away from mainline churches.

This development connects closely to new desires of Solomon Islanders that have been stimulated by the possibilities offered in the contemporary religious landscape. Furthermore, my interpretation relates to the ways in which specific forms of value within Melanesian relationships have been influenced by the growth of Pentecostalism in other South Pacific nations. For example, anthropologist of Christianity and Melanesia Annelin Eriksen observed that the relatively “new” Pentecostal churches in Ambrym, Vanuatu, “emphasize the importance of individual conversion and a personal encounter with God” while at the same time the “[e]galitarian and relational values which have been prominent in the Presbyterian Church become more marginal” (Eriksen 2012, 110). It appears that what it means to be Christian is a subject of constant debate in Melanesia today. It follows that highlighting the self-determining character of Pentecostal schisms in Honiara provides a critical perspective from which to look at the conflicts and convergences that shape contemporary Christian identities in both Solomon Islands and beyond.

**Definitions and Statement of the Problem**

In Honiara, the definition of “Pentecostal church” is itself a subject of debate among adherents and religious leaders. People who attend churches that are
historically Pentecostals, for example, Assemblies of God (AOG), United Pentecostal Church (UPC), Christian Revival Crusade (CRC), do not necessarily define themselves as Pentecostal. For all sorts of reasons, they might prefer other terms, or no term at all, and simply call themselves “Christians.” Conversely, there are churches that are not technically Pentecostal churches but their congregants or leaders often refer to themselves in this way. For example, the Kingdom Harvest Ministries International (KHMI) is an Apostolic church. However, because its members engage in such practices as speaking in tongues and prophesizing, many of them claim they are members of a Pentecostal church.

As ideas of what can be considered “Pentecostal” in Honiara are very complex, I use the term “Pentecostal-type church” to refer to those that present at least one of the following features: (1) the leader defines the church as Pentecostal; (2) the adherents define the church as Pentecostal; (3) the practices of most of the members are typical of those observed in “Pentecostal” contexts. For example, Pentecostal-type features, like glossolalia, healings, and prophecies are present in the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC), the Remnant Church of Malaita (Trompf 2004, 224), and the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) of New Georgia (Garrett 1982, 300), among others. These features are also common to a charismatic renewal group that emerged from the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), which, prior to 2008, was referred to simply as the Church of Melanesia (COM). Hence, Pentecostal-type churches in contemporary Honiara are not identified as being new in terms of these features or style of worship. Rather they are considered new because the historical conditions of their emergence are relatively recent.

A final identifying characteristic of Pentecostal-type churches in Solomon Islands is the statistical weight of their congregations when compared with other types of churches. Contrary to what political scientist Manfred Ernst argued in his 2006 work on Christianity in the Pacific, the statistical growth of Pentecostal-type churches is not to be interpreted as solely a result of foreign missionary efforts. Ernst’s argument goes as follows. Solomon Islands is a country where the number of Christians is growing within all denominations. Such church growth can be understood as directly connected to the general growth

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1 The Diocese of Melanesia became independent from the Anglican Church of New Zealand on 26 January 1975. At that time, it went by the name of Church of the Province of Melanesia, commonly called the Church of Melanesia. In this chapter, I have mainly used this name (and its acronym, COM). In 2008, the name was changed to the Anglican Church of Melanesia. When I use the acronym ACOM, it means that I am referring to events after 2008.