

Correspondence

Sir,

The paper by John Owens, 'Christianity and the Maoris to 1840', published in your April issue, is a thoughtful and well-balanced antidote to the rather glib explanation of Maori conversions advanced by Harrison Wright. However, the figure he quotes of Maori communicants in 1841 (taken from Wright) needs more careful examination.

The Annual Reports of the Kaitaia Church Missionary Society Station, held in the C.M.S. Archives, London, and in photostat by the Kaitaia Borough Council, yield the following figures for the years under discussion.

	Adult Baptisms	'Admitted to Lord's Supper'
1836	18	7
1837	16	No figure
1838	38	30
1839	60	40
1840	120	'about' 80
1841	90	74
TOTAL	342	231

The standards for adult baptism varied to some extent, but Henry Williams supervised the Mission closely and reference to the letters and journals of Joseph Matthews, W. G. Puckey and Richard Taylor, all held in typescript in the Auckland Institute and Museum Library, shows that as neither of the Kaitaia missionaries was ordained (until 1845) they customarily waited for visits from the clergy, notably Williams and Taylor, for the examination and baptism of candidates. Traditionally only a Bishop can confirm but, as the only episcopal visit to New Zealand before Selwyn's arrival in 1842 was that of Bishop Broughton of Australia to the Bay of Islands in 1838, the senior ordained missionaries were authorised to admit suitably qualified adults to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but the ceremony is not referred to as 'confirmation'.

It appears that Harrison Wright's figure for 'C.M.S. Communicants' (584) is in fact the total of those newly admitted to the sacrament at all the stations in 1841 only. (Hugh Carleton's *The Life of Henry Williams*, Auckland, 1877, II, 58, lists 21 stations in 1842.) It is necessary to see the figures of 'admittances' in context, as for example, in the 1838 Annual Letter from Kaitaia: 'In April last thirty-eight candidates for Baptism were admitted to that ordinance by the Rev. H. Williams. Thirty of those previously Baptized were admitted to the Lord's Supper', and in the Report for 1839, 'Sixty adults and twenty Infants have been admitted to the holy rite of baptism during the year. Forty were admitted to the Lord's Supper. The greater part of these by their general good conduct and diligent attendance on the means of grace have given us their Teachers a feeling of encouragement.' Further contextual comments, such as that of Matthews in a letter of October 1844 that 'there were about one hundred and forty

communicants on Sunday last, about ten Europeans', support the view that the words 'admitted to the Lord's Supper' in the Annual Reports referred to those *newly* admitted as distinct from regular communicants.

Thus Mr. Owen's use of Wright's figure of 584 as indicating the proportion of 'converts' in the population is misleading; cumulative figures, or some comparing different years, would be more helpful.

Figures of any sacraments from each station will also be affected by the particular circumstances of that district — whether an ordained man was resident there, or whether one visited the place during the period reported on: whether the people had an opportunity to gather for instruction and examination, as lack of communications and uncertain travelling sometimes precluded this. 'Communicant' figures are certainly not a reliable measure of 'conversions', though a case could be made for accepting the numbers of adults baptized as at least a general guide.

Yours faithfully,

BARBARA MABBETT

Kaitiaia

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