JOCELYN M. MURRAY

BY

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Dr Jocelyn Murray, who died at the age of 71 on 25 May 2001 (just five days before Adrian Hastings), had a long connection with the JRA as contributor, book reviewer and deputy editor. Journal readers and researchers will long be grateful for her tremendous labour in compiling the Index to Volumes I-XXVI (1967-1996). Arranged by category—contributors and titles of articles, books reviewed, thematic subjects, articles on Islam, and entries by country and ethnicity—the Index is an indispensable tool for the efficient utilisation of the rich resources of the Journal.

Jocelyn was born in Otahuhu, Auckland, New Zealand, the eldest of four children. She trained as a teacher in Wellington, where she also studied for a degree at Victoria University College. She was brought up in a strong Baptist family, coming into contact with the Anglican Church Missionary Society while she was a student. In 1954, having graduated and completed her professional training, she went to Kenya under the auspices of CMS and began work among the Kikuyu people. She was successively teacher (an energetic and creative one), then headmistress, in a girls’ school at Kahuhia, and director of adult literacy work in Weithaga, both old Anglican centres dating from the earliest days of missionary work in Kikuyuland at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1964 she set up a hostel for women workers in the burgeoning industrial centre of Thika, in Murang’a district. One of her projects in Thika was to inaugurate, with a Kikuyu colleague James Kimani, a literature distribution scheme. The Emergency of the Mau Mau period, at its height when Jocelyn first arrived in Kenya, was a fascinating and difficult time in which to be a missionary. In a reflective account written nearly 40 years later, Jocelyn describes with sensitivity her gradual growth in political understanding and increasing awareness of racial issues. I well remember her stories (told when she
stayed with me in Mukono in the late 1980s) of the rigid racial segregation which continued to exist in Kenya even in the 1960s, long after it had been eroded in Uganda, and her exploits in Nairobi with the Ugandan Revivalist leader William Nagenda, never one to be intimidated by any European, as they negotiated or evaded or challenged those barriers.

The African Revival movement, with its stress on a radical equality between missionary and African, had a great impact on her own Christian development and her growing perceptions of the ambiguities of colonialism. She writes of this encounter: ‘My real introduction to the Kikuyu Christians came through the “fellowship meeting”. When I was first taken by my colleagues, it was suggested that I should “give my testimony”, which, though translation, I did. Afterwards one of the Kikuyu men present, a leading Christian who was a fundi—a stonemason, not a teacher—told me that, like most of the missionaries, I was not a Christian! This was a considerable shock. I was, without really knowing it, being introduced to the East African Revival Fellowship, and was about to be put through the “trial by testimony” which has happened to so many young missionaries. . . . It was many years before I was “accepted”. But I soon grew to like, appreciate and then to love the men and women whom I met through the Fellowship. . . . As I literally sat at the feet of the old Kikuyu women, and listened to what I could understand, I began to learn about a kind of faith and love which owed little to books, but which had been tested in living.”

Jocelyn left Kenya to pursue research in California, completing a PhD at UCLA in 1974 on the 1929 female circumcision conflict within the churches of Kikuyuland and Embu in Kenya. This remains a pioneering work, rich in material based on fieldwork and her accumulated knowledge of the area, and giving a new importance to women’s perceptions. Jocelyn’s close contacts over many years with African women of all ages in this part of Kenya, and her knowledge of Kikuyu and Swahili, stood her in good stead in both collecting and analysing her data.

From 1974 to 1977 Jocelyn worked in the Religious Studies Department of the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, as research assistant to a fellow New Zealander, Dr Harold Turner, while he established his centre for New Religious Movements. Professor Andrew Walls and Dr Adrian Hastings were her colleagues in the department. Always valuing the community of scholars, she developed a wide network of fellow researchers and writers, teachers and religious leaders, from Africa and elsewhere, who were involved in African religious and mission stud-