# JOHN DORAN (1966–2012): AN APPRECIATION

John Doran's sudden and premature death on 31 October 2012 tragically deprived his wife Aleta and their three young daughters of a devoted husband and father. At this moment, too, the Ecclesiastical History Society also lost a part of its future, for John was one of its most loyal and talented younger members, a medievalist whose appointment as one of the two editors of Studies in Church History had been confirmed just three months earlier.

John was a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of the History Department at the University of Chester and Co-Chair of the M6 Group of Historians, a gathering of medievalists from the various universities in the North-West. Outstanding on all levels as a teacher, his impressive skill in public speaking had led *The New Statesman* magazine in August 2012 to feature his topical lecture on 'Horses in Warfare' as one of the three most highly recommended talks to attend across the whole country. John's professional career was flourishing. Internationally recognized as a leading authority on the city of Rome and the papacy in the Middle Ages, his monograph, *The Legacy of Schism: Relations between Popes and Romans in the Twelfth Century*, was gradually edging towards publication, another work to add to an impressive collection of articles, chapters, edited volumes and online bibliographies.

In April 1986, John, an undergraduate from Royal Holloway College, came to the then Westfield College to join the 'Pope Innocent III' special subject class and took part in the study visit based at the British School at Rome in September of the same year. This period would lay the foundation of his academic career and reveal his consuming passion for papal history. An excellent linguist, he rejoiced in the opportunity to consult the rich collection of books on history, art and topography in the library of the British School. At the Vatican Library, he met the Prefect, Father Leonard Boyle, and in the Secret Archives, Monsignor Charles Burns, two exceptional scholars with both of whom he enjoyed a deep and lasting friendship.

In June 1987, John was awarded a three-year postgraduate British Academy Studentship to work on 'The City of Rome and



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the Papacy (1188–1227)', supervised by Professor Jonathan Riley-Smith at Royal Holloway. Subsequently, in 1990 and again in 1991, he obtained grants from the British School at Rome for further research. John's parents were in poor health, and he helped to care for them in Liverpool, taking on part-time lecturing posts at Edgehill and Chester colleges and leading highly successful weekend History courses on the Isle of Man. In 1993, he joined the Ecclesiastical History Society and gave his first paper, today still the only work in English to address the issue of child oblation in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, published in *The Church and Childhood* (SCH 31); a second, on the Latin Mission to Nicaea in 1234, appeared in *Unity and Diversity in the Church* (SCH 32).[1] Both articles revealed the breadth, range and mastery of detail which was to run throughout his work.

Between January and March 1997, John taught an evening class on 'The City of Rome' and there he first met Aleta, whose interests lay in Roman art, architecture and mosaics. They married in July 2000 in Chester. Several members of the society were present and so much enjoyed the wedding reception at Chester College that in July 2001 the Summer Conference was held on its campus. John was called upon to arrange the excursions, the guided tours to Liverpool's outstanding churches and the Saturday trip to Sandbach and Little Moreton Hall. He then assumed the onerous position of Conference Secretary, which involved arranging the Summer Meetings at Leeds (2002), Exeter (2003), attended by Anastasia, then eighteen months old, and an embryonic Cecilia, Liverpool (2004), at which Aleta provided the best picnic lunch that we ever had, Lancaster (2005), Cardiff (2006) and Leicester (2007), as well as the Winter Meetings in January of each year. John's unfailing good humour and excellent organization were rarely in question throughout this period. All the while, Aleta kept his feet firmly on the ground by presenting him with their third daughter, Susanna.

John's academic work and his personal life were inseparably linked. His knowledge of Rome, its history, buildings, rulers,

[1] 'Oblation or Obligation? A Canonical Ambiguity', in Diana Wood, ed., *The Church and Childhood*, SCH 31 (Oxford, 1994), 127–41; 'Rites and Wrongs: The Latin Mission to Nicaea, 1234', in R. N. Swanson, ed., *Unity and Diversity in the Church*, SCH 32 (Oxford, 1996), 131–44.



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archives and extensive bibliography in so many languages was unparalleled and he was always eager to share his discoveries – and there were very many – with his family and anyone else who was interested. Amongst these were Jonathan Phillips, his supervisor, together with Anne Duggan and Marcus Bull, the examiners of his doctorate, awarded in 2008. He produced two very highly commended *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, on Gregory VII and Innocent III, and, whilst several of his articles were on aspects of Innocent III's pontificate, he by no means confined himself to one pope or even to the city of Rome. Also in 2008, together with Damian Smith, his friend and fellow historian from Royal Holloway, he contributed to and edited a volume on Celestine III, Innocent III's predecessor, whose full sixty years of service in the curia had previously been almost completely ignored. He also worked on Gregory VII, Eugenius III, Alexander III and Honorius III, and three of his articles on these popes remain to be published posthumously. In the collection of essays entitled *Roma Felix*, reviewed by Thomas F. X. Noble of Notre Dame University in the *English Historical Review*, John's discussion of the treatise (*c.*1195) by Lucian, monk of St Werburgh, in praise of Chester and his comparison of the city with Rome was singled out as the most outstanding and original chapter. John was justifiably proud of this commendation.

John's enduring legacy as an historian of international repute has been secured by his friends, Dr Paul Baker of Glasgow and Professor Damian Smith of Saint Louis, who have made possible the eventual completion of his unfinished but extremely important book on Rome and the Romans. John's proposed edited volume on Pope Innocent II is under way and two postgraduate studentships, the John Doran Prize at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Saint Louis University for the best graduate paper in the fields of either History or History of Art, and a similar studentship in John's name at the University of Chester, will both be offered for the first time in the autumn of 2013. This volume (50) of Studies in Church History is dedicated to his memory.

None of these practical arrangements should divert us from John's deep Christian faith, which underpinned his whole life. Prayers and masses were said for him by colleagues and friends across the world: from the Frari in Venice to Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford; from Saint Louis University, Missouri, to Pensacola,



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Florida; Providence, Rhode Island, St Albans, Cambridge, Chelmsford, London and many other places besides. How appropriate, therefore, that John should have chosen as a subtitle for his article on Alexander III and Rome, published in 2012, 'At last we reached the Port of Salvation'. We who are left behind can do no better than to share in his absolute certainty.

Brenda Bolton



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