Chapter 1

John Paul II: A Man for All Seasons

In This Chapter

- ▶ Seeing how he plotted his own course
- ▶ Reading his writings
- ► Understanding his philosophy and theology
- Knowing where he stood
- ▶ Taking a look at everything he accomplished

Robert Bolt's play titled *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) was about the life of Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England, who remained completely faithful to his God, his church, and his conscience even to the point of death. Although fidelity is easy when things are going well, maintaining and persevering in one's faith in times of trial and tribulation is not an easy task. Thomas More was called a "man for all seasons" because he didn't allow public opinion or political pressure to infect his soul.

Karol Wojtyla, who became Pope John Paul II, can also be called a "man for all seasons," because he did not allow anything to weaken his faith. Neither the German Nazis who invaded his homeland during World War II nor the Soviet Russians who occupied Poland throughout the Cold War could discourage this man's convictions and commitment to his religion. Despite a would-be assassin's bullets and Parkinson's disease, JP2 never succumbed to discouragement.

Both Thomas More (1478–1535) and John Paul II were poets, philosophers, and men of many talents. They were truly spiritual men who loved their countries but loved their God even more than their own lives. Like More, JP2 was a man of conscience and a *Renaissance man* (someone who has a broad education and has some proficiency in the arts, humanities, and sciences).

At the movies

One of Pope John Paul II's favorite movies in English (according to anonymous sources) was the screen adaptation of Bolt's play *A Man For All Seasons* (1966), starring Paul Scofield as Sir Thomas More, Robert Shaw as King Henry VIII, and the famous Orson Welles as Cardinal Wolsey. The Academy Award—winning movie

was later resurrected in a 1988 version with Charlton Heston as More and Sir John Gielgud as Wolsey. Ironically, Vanessa Redgrave was in both movies; she played Anne Boleyn (Henry VIII's second wife and mother of Elizabeth I) in the first film and played Lady Alice, Sir Thomas More's wife, in the remake.

In this chapter, you discover how Pope John Paul II was a true pioneer in the sense that he went into uncharted waters and territory. We show you how he made an impact on the world itself, how he left an indelible mark on the Catholic Church, how he injected his own style and flavor into the papacy, and how he brought his Polish culture and personal faith into his public role as leader of the world's largest religion. Groundbreaker, innovator, defender, protector, shepherd, and pastor — these are but a few of the hats Pope John Paul II wore.

Being a Groundbreaker

John Paul II came from an ancient land steeped in tradition, was raised in a 2,000-year-old religion, and would become the visible defender of traditional morality and orthodox doctrine. At the same time, JP2 was innovative, not in content but in presentation. He showed his followers how the Church and especially the papacy could — and should — adapt to the modern world.

JP2 broke the stereotype of popes being elderly Italian church bureaucrats. Unlike some of his predecessors, he was elected at the young age of 58; was the first non-Italian pope since the 16th century; and traveled more than any other pope in history. He had the third longest reigning papacy (after St. Peter and Blessed Pius IX). The non-Catholic world, however, will remember John Paul II for his groundbreaking efforts to open dialogue with members and leaders of other faiths and religions. His gestures to heal wounds between Christians and Jews and between Catholics and Protestants were sincere and profound — if not totally successful.

The first Polish pope — and the first non-Italian in 455 years

The first mold John Paul II broke was the origin of the popes. JP2 was the first non-Italian pope in 455 years. The last non-Italian was Cardinal Adrian Florensz Boeyens, a Dutchman, elected Pope Adrian VI in 1522. From the time of St. Peter (the Jewish fisherman Jesus chose to head his church, whom Catholics consider the first pope) to Benedict XVI (the current pope, as of this writing), we've had 217 popes from Italy, 17 from France, 8 from Germany, 3 from Spain, and 1 each from Africa, England, Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland, and Palestine (present-day Israel).

Why the Italian monopoly? Believe it or not, no strong-arm tactics were involved here. The practical reason was that, until the era of John Paul II, the papacy was very much involved in local concerns involving the diocese of Rome, of which the pope is the bishop, and surrounding Italian dioceses of Italy. It made sense to elect a local, an Italian, who not only spoke the language but who knew the culture and the problems the local and national churches were experiencing.

These days, the popes no longer need to worry about national defense and other domestic issues that other world leaders have to contend with every day. The small 109 acres of land that make up the Vatican are merely a home, a place of pilgrimage, and a center of ecclesiastical administration.

Since the time of Pope Paul VI (1963–1978), who was the first pontiff to visit five continents (and was called the "pilgrim pope" until the arrival of John Paul II), the universal ministry of the office became more relevant. Instead of just handling the affairs of the diocese of Rome or the Catholic Church in Italy, the papacy in the latter half of the 20th century became much more global in its perspective.

With the College of Cardinals comprising representatives from almost every nation on Earth, the unofficial Italian "monopoly" over the papacy ceased to exist. The year Pope John Paul II was elected (1978) was as good a time as any to elect a non-Italian, even if it hadn't been done for 455 years.

The last pope of the 20th century — and the first pope of the 21st

John Paul II has the unique claim of being the last pope of the 20th century and the first pope of the 21st century; he reigned from 1978 to 2005. Because of the unique time in which he was pope, a time of numerous technological advances, Pope John Paul II was able to bring the Church and the papacy into the 21st century, embracing technology instead of shunning it.

The *message* would be the same: perennial teaching of Christ as found both in Sacred Scripture (the Bible) and Sacred Tradition and as taught for two millennia by the Catholic Church. The *medium* by which the message was delivered would utilize the best the contemporary world had to offer. Pope John Paul II used modern tools to bring time-honored values and principles to a new generation.

JP2 inaugurated the Vatican Web site on Easter (March 30) 1997, and was considered the first "high-tech pope." Unlike previous popes who occasionally used modern media like radio and television, John Paul II was the first to capitalize on and utilize the full potential of high-tech communications. His weekly Wednesday audiences were broadcast by radio, television, satellite, short-wave radio, and Internet to all corners of the Earth.

Reaching out: Around the world, across religions, and to young people everywhere

John Paul II certainly broke the mold when he took the papacy on the road. Other popes had traveled, but none of his successors would cover as many miles, visit as many nations, and be seen and heard by as many people of every age, race, and background. Some old-time Vatican bureaucrats thought he traveled too much and should have stayed home more to "mind the store." But in practice, Vatican City (as an independent country) and the Holy See (as the administrative center of the one-billion-member organization) virtually run by themselves in terms of the day-to-day business and work that has to be done. The pope does not micromanage every diocese or nation. For the most part, he lets the local bishop shepherd his own flock.

Pope John Paul II's 104 pastoral trips to 129 countries around the globe were always media events, attracting reporters and journalists from every nation. He used the press to help communicate his message to the universal flock he was shepherding, even if those who covered him did not completely agree with him. He was the first pope to actually hold press conferences on airplanes during his worldwide travels.



JP2 was a true groundbreaker not only because he used modern media, but also because he was the first to make monumental advances in *ecumenism* (efforts to bring more unity and cooperation among all religions). As the first pope to visit a Jewish synagogue (in 1986) since St. Peter, he referred to all Jews as "our elder brothers." John Paul II was also the first pope ever to visit an Islamic mosque (in Damascus in 2001) and was the first pope ever to preach in a Lutheran church (in 1983).

The third longest pontificate: 26 years, 5 months, 17 days

John Paul I had one of the ten shortest papacies (33 days), but his successor, John Paul II, had the third longest. St. Peter, considered the first pope, is thought to have served 37 years, from A.D. 30 to approximately A.D. 67. This would have been, so far, the longest pontificate in history.

Blessed Pius IX (1846–1878) reigned 31 years, 7 months, and 23 days (or a total of 11,560 days, if you go in for the big numbers) and ranks number two in papal longevity. He was only 54 years old when he was elected pope, and he died at the age of 85.

John Paul II (1978–2005) ruled 26 years, 5 months, and 17 days (or a total of 9,665 days).

Four years older than Pius IX when he was elected, JP2 was an energetic and athletic 58-year-old when the cardinals chose him to be pope. Some even called him "God's athlete" due to his love of hiking, swimming, and skiing. Many doctors and physicians have speculated that, had he not been shot in 1981 and had he not contracted Parkinson's disease, this robust man could have surpassed the previous two and been the longest reigning pope in history, living well into his 90s or longer. Unfortunately, he was shot and he did get Parkinson's, but the fact that he was able to survive both until he was a month and half away from his 85th birthday is still noteworthy.

Besides his efforts to communicate with the spiritual leaders of other religions and with the political leaders of other nations — whether capitalist, socialist, or communist — JP2 was also a groundbreaker in reaching out to the youth. He was the first pope to have World Youth Day, an annual event in which young people across the globe get together with the head of the Catholic Church. Since 1986, these events have brought together anywhere from 300,000 to more than 4 million young men and women at one place and time.

Author, Author

Most people know of John Paul II's papal encyclicals (see Chapter 22) and letters. What a lot of people don't know is that he authored many books:

- ✓ Sign of Contradiction (1979)
- ✓ Love and Responsibility (1960, Polish; 1980, English translation)
- ✓ The Way to Christ: Spiritual Exercises (1982)
- ✓ Crossing the Threshold of Hope (1994)

- ✓ Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination (1996)
- ✓ The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan (1997)
- ▶ Pope John Paul II: In My Own Words (1998)
- ✓ Forgiveness: Thoughts for the New Millennium (1999)
- ✓ *Get Up, Let Us Go* (2004)
- ✓ Lessons for Living (2004)
- ✓ Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium (2005)

JP2 is best known for being the first Polish pope, and then as a theologian and philosopher in his own right, before and during his papacy. He was also a poet and playwright. Like the several languages he spoke fluently, this man was also of several talents, interests, and abilities. During Nazi occupation and then under Communist control, freedom of thought was not encouraged and freedom of speech not tolerated. Plays and poetry were two ways that patriotic citizens maintained their heritage.

Playwright

Not only did John Paul II write books, he also wrote plays. Besides plays based on biblical characters like *David*, *Job*, and *Jeremiah*, he also wrote plays like *Our God's Brother, The Jeweler's Shop*, and *The Radiation of Fatherhood: A Mystery*, dealing with the universal themes of faith and practicing it in day-to-day life. The last two he wrote under the pseudonym of Andrzej Jawien to avoid being caught by KGB agents in Soviet-controlled Poland.



Since the time of the Nazi occupation during World War II and throughout the Soviet control of Poland during the Cold War, resistance to Fascism and Communism took expression in the arts, especially in plays, prose, and poetry. Authors tried to keep the flames of freedom burning in the hearts of their countrymen despite the occupation and oppression. A common safeguard to avoid arrest and possible torture was to use a pseudonym whenever writing such material.

The Jeweler's Shop is a three-act play still available in English today. The setting is, as the title suggests, a jewelry shop, and the main characters are three couples who enter the store. Each couple has a different struggle, as well as a different understanding and experience of love, doubt, fear, disappointment, disillusion, and hope. The moral of the story is to not give up, which applies not just to married life, but also to religious and spiritual life and to an oppressed people whose country has been occupied or controlled by another nation.

Poet

John Paul II also wrote poetry. Through his poems, you get a glimpse into his heart and soul as a man and a human being. He wrote some poems during and after World War II, during his priesthood, during his *episcopacy* (the time spent in the government of the church as a bishop, archbishop, and a cardinal), and even during his pontificate. The poems show a tender, vulnerable, yet still very confident nature of the man who became the Bishop of Rome and head of the Catholic Church.

Here is a sample of his poetry from a poem he wrote in 1939 about his mother, Emilia, who had died tragically when Karol (John Paul's name at birth and his baptismal name) was only 9 years old.

"Over This, Your White Grave"

Over this, your white grave the flowers of life in white — so many years without you — how many have passed out of sight? Over this your white grave covered for years, there is a stir in the air, something uplifting and, like death, beyond comprehension. Over this your white grave oh, mother, can such loving cease? for all his filial adoration a prayer: Give her eternal peace —

John Paul II had a very strong devotion to the Virgin Mary, which was probably based not only on his staunch Catholic upbringing, but also on his Polish heritage and his need to be a son and have a mother he could turn to for comfort. Mary was not a substitute for his mother, Emilia, but the mother of Christ was still his spiritual mother, because Jesus, her biological son, was also his spiritual brother.

Becoming a Philosopher-Theologian

When John Paul II was still Karol Wojtyła, a teenager in high school, he was so good at public speaking that he was chosen to give the welcome address to a very special dignitary visiting the school one day. Prince Adam Stefan Stanisław Bonfatiusz Józef Sapieha (that's a mouthful), the Archbishop of

Krakow and one of the most dignified members of Polish aristocracy, came for a visit. When he heard the eloquent speech given by Wojtyła, he asked one of his teachers if the lad was headed for the seminary. His professor replied that Karol had designs on going to Jagiellonian University to study philology (linguistics). Momentarily disappointed, thinking the church was losing a potential intellectual jewel for the priesthood, the archbishop merely replied, "Too bad." Little did he know then that divine providence had another plan for Karol Wojtyła.

Loving linguistics

As an incoming freshman, Karol Wojtyła had a heavy load. He studied not only Polish grammar, phonetics, and etymology but also the Old Slavonic and Russian languages. He loved language because it conveyed to others what was in the mind and heart of the writer or speaker of that tongue.

Language is the cornerstone of civilization, because it unites individuals and ideas. Without language, or without a means of communication, no society, no community can exist. Many occupying powers impose a foreign language on a conquered nation and often outlaw the native dialect to prevent a national identity. Yet, a common language, even if foreign, would sometimes have the opposite effect and unite people of the same nation who initially spoke completely different dialects and who, beforehand, could not easily communicate with those outside their own region. John Paul II not only had a talent for learning languages, he truly loved being able to communicate with others in their native tongue. He understood the philosophy of language and showed how to communicate verbally and nonverbally throughout his pontificate. A multilingual pope who traveled the world made the *catholic* (universal) part of his job and of his church have more meaning than ever before.

Showing a keen mind for linguistics, the young Karol developed a love of theater and poetry. In both of these, language was at its best. Polish plays and poems not only showed pride in the motherland but also instilled appreciation of the culture, art, and history of the people who lived in that country. He even helped form a student theater group known as Studio 39, and it was there that he felt an attraction to the stage. Even though he was not known as a "ham" actor seeking attention and applause at every opportunity, Wojtyła nevertheless recognized the power of presence. As a linguist, he knew the importance and effect of words. As an actor, he knew the importance of how those words were spoken and even the impact of saying nothing at all, just allowing the symbols and gestures to speak for themselves.

Secretly studying philosophy

In 1942, seminaries were officially closed like the colleges and universities, so Wojtyła pursued a covert underground education. Hidden in the residence of Archbishop Sapieha of Krakow, he discovered the sublime beauty of philosophy. He learned about the great philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas.

He was ordained a priest on November 1, 1946; two weeks later, he was sent to Rome to continue his studies and earn his first doctorate. His bishop sent him to the Angelicum, a seminary run by the Dominicans (brothers and priests of a religious community who follow the spirituality of St. Dominic from the 13th century, a contemporary of St. Francis of Assisi). St. Thomas Aquinas was not only the preeminent theologian of the Catholic Church, but also one of its finest philosophers and he happened to be a Dominican. No mystery then that Father Wojtyła would be immersed in scholastic philosophy, sometimes called *Thomism*, after Thomas Aquinas.

He threw himself into understanding such complex topics as objective realism, Natural Moral Law, and the three levels of truth (scientific, philosophical, and theological). So, to Karol Wojtyła, science and faith were not at odds with each other. Instead, they were two ways of examining the same reality.

Wojtyła defended his dissertation and passed his examinations with flying colors in 1948 but could not get the degree from his alma mater, the Angelicum. He was too poor to have his doctoral dissertation printed, and the seminary required that the dissertation be printed prior to conferring the degree. When he returned to Poland, Father Wojtyła resubmitted his paper to Jagiellonian University, and it awarded him a doctorate in theology. He earned a second doctorate in theology in 1954.



Thomistic philosophy and theology and other philosophies shaped the mind of Karol Wojtyła. Whether it was abortion, euthanasia, contraception, or the death penalty; economic, political, and social justice; he was always on the same page: promoting and defending what is good for humans, individually and communally. John Paul II believed that the ultimate good was the happiness found in knowing and doing the Will of God.

Wondering about a Sign of Contradiction

The greatest *paradox* (or apparent contradiction) in Christianity is that death brought life: The death of Jesus Christ on the cross brought eternal life to the human race. Before Christians can live forever in heaven, they must first die here on Earth. It seems a contradiction that death, which is the absence of

life, would somehow be the cause or catalyst for life, yet that belief is what Christianity is founded upon. The cross itself and the crucifixion — symbols of shame, guilt, crime, punishment, and death since their creation — become symbols of love, forgiveness, mercy, and eternal life. This ultimate sign of contradiction is also called the *divine paradox*.

John Paul II was also, in many ways, a paradox. He could not easily be labeled as a liberal or a conservative. When he spoke out against the death penalty and capital punishment, the press and media tried to label him a liberal. When he reiterated the Church's ban on artificial contraception, women's ordination, homosexual marriage, or abandoning the discipline of mandatory priestly celibacy in the Western Church, they called him a conservative.

Liberal theologians who promoted political activism saw John Paul II as a staunch conservative when he publicly chastised Father Ernesto Cardinal (also a member of the Marxist Sandinista government) of Nicaragua in 1983 on the tarmac at Managua Airport. JP2 saw no place in government for any member of the clergy. Instead, he believed the government was the proper environment for the *laity* (members of the Church who are not part of the clergy) to be and to witness good lay leadership.

George Weigel points out in his book *Witness to Hope* that there are not two Wojtyłas — one a traditional, fundamentalist conservative on doctrinal and moral matters, and the other a liberal, social progressive on economic and political matters. "There is only one Karol Wojtyła" whose faith is not reduced to an ideology or an agenda but is intimately connected and dependent on the living 2,000-year-old church founded by Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

One of the ways John Paul II differed from many of his predecessors was that he was not by any means a bureaucrat. He was a shepherd, a teacher, and a priest. Although some people may have initially considered the papal road trips (see "Reaching out: Around the world, across religions, and to young people everywhere," earlier in this chapter) neither proper nor dignified for the Supreme Roman Pontiff (they preferred that others come visit him), they eventually saw this as a real evangelization, bringing the good news like the first pope St. Peter and his companion St. Paul, the missionary apostle, did when they journeyed from place to place.

Like his predecessor Pope John Paul I, JP2 chose not to be crowned with the papal tiara and replaced the coronation ceremony with an installation one. Ultraconservatives considered him liberal for not restoring many of the elaborate or detailed traditions, which had developed in the papacy over the centuries but which Pope Paul VI discarded after the close of the Second Vatican Council, also known as Vatican II (see the nearby "Vatican II" sidebar for more).



Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council, sometimes known as Vatican II, was a gathering of the Catholic bishops from around the world, which met in Rome from 1962 to 1965. There have been 21 ecumenical or general councils in Catholic Church history, from the First Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 to the Second Vatican Council attended by John Paul II, who was then Bishop Wojtyła. The first seven or eight councils met to define doctrinal points or settle theological

controversies. The Council of Trent met from 1545 to 1563 to respond to the Protestant Reformation. Vatican II, unlike the previous 20 councils, was not convened to solve a problem but to address pastoral concerns of the modern era. Although no new doctrines or dogmas were defined, and no previous ones were dissolved, this council attempted to teach and explain the old faith in new language and with newer techniques.

Ultraliberals thought JP2 was an archaic, draconian traditionalist when he would not allow liturgical innovations and experimentation; when he gave permission for the old Tridentine Mass to be said in Latin, they were sure he was on the far right. At the same time, the far right considered him a "bleedingheart liberal" when he called for wealthy nations to forgive the debts of poorer nations, when he allowed women to be altar servers, and when he added five more mysteries to the Rosary.

John Paul II however, did not see anything he did or said in terms of left or right, liberal or conservative, progressive or traditional. As Weigel put it, Karol Wojtyła was a *radical* Catholic Christian, in the original sense of the term.



Although many people might use the word *radical* to denote someone on the far left, as opposed to a *reactionary* on the far right, Weigel uses the precise dictionary definition of *radical* based on the Latin word *radix* meaning "root." *Radical Christianity* is not aligned with Communists and socialists; rather, it is Christianity taken very seriously, to the very root and core of what it means to be Christian.



John Paul II was indeed a radical Catholic in that he was thoroughly Catholic to the very core of his being. Christianity permeated everything he said or did — while he was growing up, while he was a student, while he was a worker and layman, while he was a priest and bishop, and while he was pope. For JP2, the Church was more than an institution; it was his beloved spouse. He saw himself as the Vicar of Christ, which meant that he had to love as Christ loved, to forgive as Christ forgave, to teach as Christ taught.

His Catholic Christian faith was not limited or defined by political, economic, or social theories. In many ways, he was his own man in that he did not seek to impress anyone, but he always tried to persuade and convince others.

Revisiting His Legacy

The legacy of John Paul II is still materializing and developing. The quarter-century he led the Church encouraged many vocations to the priesthood and religious life. After the confusion that followed after Vatican II — not from the documents themselves but from what many claimed to be the "spirit of Vatican II" rather than the actual and literal message of Vatican II — some priests and nuns abandoned their vows, there was a rise in the divorce rate, fewer people attended Mass, there was more dissent among theologians, and more Catholics ignored Church teaching and discipline altogether.

Paul VI had closed Vatican II in 1965, but it was under his pontificate that much of the spiritual decay had begun to infect the mystical body of Christ. Paul VI tried to preserve, protect, and repair the damage, but the sexual and cultural revolutions were simultaneously transforming the world into a place of greater instability and uncertainty. John Paul II came in 1978 and did not repeal or repudiate the Second Vatican Council; rather, he sought to fully, properly, thoroughly, and correctly implement what the Council Fathers had intended but that time and circumstance had previously prevented from happening.

JP2 did not come to set back the clock to before 1963. He came to prepare the Church and the world for the third millennium, which would come as soon as the 20th century ended and the 21st began. He sought reconciliation where possible. He defended the consistent, perennial teachings of the 2,000-year-old religion. He used modern tools — like the jet plane, the Internet, television, and radio — to spread his message. He preserved the rich heritage and patrimony of Catholicism, while at the same time he shook some of the dust off the places that had become complacent and lethargic.

John Paul II did not define any new dogmas, nor did he deny, dilute, or tamper with the revealed truths he was entrusted with as Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church. He did explain the age-old doctrines in a brighter light and with full enthusiasm and gusto. Prolific in his writings and speeches, Pope John Paul II had an important message — but as a former actor and poet, he also knew the importance of how the message was delivered.



The pope is considered by Catholics to be the head of the entire Universal Catholic Church while a local bishop is head of the diocese and the local pastor is the head of the parish church. *Universal Church* is used to refer to the Catholic Church as a whole.

JP2 could defend the tradition of priestly celibacy while extolling the virtues of married love between one man and one woman for the rest of their lives. He could defend the doctrine of a male priesthood while denouncing the exploitation of women through pornography and abortion. He spoke of the sacredness of each human person and the beauty of conjugal love open to the possibility of new life. He associated with all who suffer, because of the sufferings of his own past — losing his mother, brother, and father at an early age; living under Nazi and Communist oppression; surviving a would-be assassin's bullet; and his long battle with Parkinson's disease.

He was not able to convince all Catholics to embrace completely and totally all that the Church teaches, all the doctrines, disciplines, and sacred rituals. He could not get the Eastern Orthodox, for example, to come any closer to ecclesiastical unity, and the Protestant churches did not pack up and move to Rome.



Since 1054, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have been divided. Prior to that, there was one Christian Church with several patriarchs (bishops from historical places of antiquity — for example, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople). The division was called the *Eastern Schism*, and the churches that separated and sought to be autonomous from Rome and the pope are called Eastern Orthodox. The patriarch of Moscow became independent in 1589. Although the Orthodox churches do not accept the primacy of jurisdiction of the pope as Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church, they do share the same theology, have the same seven sacraments, and have a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. Though very similar in substantial areas, the political and jurisdictional differences have historically prevented a formal reunion of the Eastern Orthodox and Western (Roman) Catholic churches.



The Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517 with Martin Luther then with John Calvin, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer, John Wesley, and others, broke from Rome and created the Lutheran, Calvinist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist churches. Unlike the Eastern Schism in the 11 century, the 16th-century Protestant Reformation divided Western Christendom along doctrinal and liturgical lines as well as jurisdiction.

Does the fact that JP2 wasn't able to achieve all of his goals mean he failed? Should he have even tried? Well, look at it this way: For a long time, nothing was said about the dangers of cigarette smoking. Then doctors and the surgeon general began telling everyone that smoking can cause cancer. Despite the amount of information and the scope to which it has been disseminated, there are still those who choose not to believe or to just ignore the warnings. Likewise, despite the global access John Paul II had, the 26 years he had it, and the wonderful manner he had in spreading it, not everyone paid attention. Those who did will never forget. Those who actually embraced it will never regret it. Not a waste then, after all.

A People's Pope: John Paul the Great?

Even before his death, some were calling him John Paul the Great. At his funeral and after his burial, the usage has become prolific. Only three other popes in history have had the honor of the title "the Great." Whereas only a pope can canonize a saint, it has been the prerogative of the people and posterity to bestow the title "the Great." It's an informal but rare moniker saved for those very few who surpassed their contemporaries and many of their predecessors in achievements, accomplishments, impact, and overall influence.

Many contemporary scholars believe that Karol Wojtyła will eventually inherit the title "John Paul the Great" for several reasons:

- ✓ On the global level, he was instrumental in the dissolution of the Soviet Empire with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the unraveling of the Warsaw Pact, and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. Although he did not personally coordinate or participate in any of those incidents, he did make it easier for them to occur, and many people consider him the catalyst history needed at the time. He preached a nonviolent resistance to those who are denied human rights and dignity, like the freedom to worship. (Take a look at Chapter 13 for an in-depth look at JP2's role in the process.)
- ✓ He made the papacy truly international by taking it on the road. By visiting millions of people in hundreds of nations, he showed how universal the Catholic Church was. Speaking several languages fluently, he visited foreign lands, made many cardinals (the guys who advise the pope and who elect the new one when the old one dies) from almost every nation, and invited the youth of the planet to gather every year at World Youth Day. He made the papacy and the Catholic Church extremely visible during his pontificate.
- ✓ He was the first pope in a century to revise the Code of Canon Law (which had not been done since 1917) and the first pope to revise the Catechism in 450 years. He canonized more saints than any of his predecessors and did so from all four corners of the Earth, from every race and nation. (Chapter 14 gives you all the details on his saint-making activities.)



Being "great" does not mean John Paul II was perfect or sinless. Even the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility does not cross that line. Designating John Paul as "the Great" is not a dogmatic or spiritual judgment on the man. It is merely a title of convention given by history to those few who influenced so many people for the good. Mistakes? Sure, he made some — and he would've been the first to admit it. He acknowledged that he was like the rest of us sinners, in need of mercy and forgiveness. And he confidently — and regularly — went to confession.

The other Greats

Here's a quick summary of the accomplishments the other "Greats" achieved:

- **✓ Pope St. Leo the Great (A.D. 440–461)**: Leo was impressive in his ability to shepherd wisely and bravely. He is personally credited with convincing Attila the Hun to spare the Eternal City (Rome) in A.D. 452. When he sent a theological treatise (called a tome) to the ecumenical council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, he succinctly explained the doctrine of Christ being one divine person with two equal and distinct natures — human and divine — yet united in the one divine hypostasis (hence the term, the hypostatic union). The council fathers, upon hearing this read, proclaimed, "God has spoken to us through Peter." (Leo, like all popes, was considered the successor of St. Peter.)
- Pope St. Gregory the Great (A.D. 590–604):
 Gregory was able to keep the Church intact and even prosper spiritually after the shadow of the fall of the Roman Empire.
 Born a hundred years after the city of Rome fell in A.D. 476, Gregory inspired a renewal that sought to prioritize the spiritual and moral values in a world devastated by war and violence. He was instrumental in the proliferation of monasteries throughout

- Europe, which eventually led to the conversion and civilization of the very barbarians who had come to rape, pillage, and sack the people and lands of the old empire.
- ✓ Pope St. Nicholas the Great (A.D. 858–867): Nicholas, like Leo and Gregory, had to contend with a crumbling and falling empire. Whereas the previous guys dealt with the chaos of the fall of the Roman Empire and the ensuing barbarian invasions. Nicholas had to confront the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire. When Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in A.D. 800, there was a brief period of peaceful unity in Western Europe, and it was evidenced in one rule (Holy Roman Empire) and one religion (Christianity), one emperor and one pope. There were no divisions among the churches until the Eastern Schism in 1054 and again when the Protestant Reformation took place in the 16th century. At the death of Charlemagne, however, unified Christendom began to unravel. The warring factions of Franks, Lombards, Saxons, Normans, and others would have destroyed everything had Nicholas not been able to keep some reasonable calm and order.

Not a shabby group to be part of. . . .