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**Rev. John Trigilio, Jr., PhD, ThD**

**Rev. Kenneth Brighenti, PhD**

*Authors of Catholicism For Dummies*





***John Paul II***  
FOR  
**DUMMIES®**  
SPECIAL EDITION

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Rev. Kenneth Brighenti, PhD; and  
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# Dedication

This book is dedicated in memory of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, whom we firmly believe and trust will one day be proclaimed John Paul the Great and Doctor of the Church (the *Luminous Doctor*, just as St. Thomas Aquinas was known as the *Angelic Doctor* and St. Bonaventure as the *Seraphic Doctor*). Although his beatification and canonization are within the hands of Almighty God and the current reigning pope, like many of the faithful, we are confident that these, too, will eventually happen in time as per Divine Providence. Each one of us owes a great debt of gratitude for the example, inspiration, and model of priestly sanctity, personal piety, and pastoral love John Paul lived and expressed throughout his priesthood and pontificate. We grew up with heroes like the courageous astronauts who landed on the moon and the honest athletes who showed good sportsmanship, but when we became adults, the temptation to cynicism arose thanks to scandals, dishonor, deceit, and disgrace, which infected sports, politics, and even some within religion itself. Then, when it seemed as if a dark shadow of malaise had permeated every institution from church to state, God sent us a priest, prophet, and shepherd — a wise man from the East (at least Eastern Europe), called Karol Wojtyła. His 26-year papacy, in its zeal, its orthodoxy, and its effect, inspired many of us to follow the “fisherman” and become priests. May the Good Lord reward Pope John Paul II for his great love and service and the sacrifices he rendered to save souls and to serve Holy Mother Church as the Servant of the Servants of God. We commend him in our prayers to the bosom of Our Lady, Queen of the Clergy and Mother of the Church, so she may escort him to her Son Whom he loved and served to the best of his ability.

We also commend this work to our current pope, Benedict XVI. As (Cardinal Ratzinger) a faithful friend, loyal servant and accomplished advisor, he served Pope John Paul II to the best of his abilities. As he now brings those same gifts to the Church as Vicar of Christ himself, we believe that the good work begun by JP2 will continue and flourish under B16.

This book is also dedicated in memory of our dear friend and colleague, Father James Pilsner, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York and member of the Board of Directors of the Confraternity of Catholic Clergy as well as Treasurer of our organization, who passed away suddenly while we were writing this book. May Christ the High Priest give him eternal rest.

## *Authors' Acknowledgments*

We wish to thank the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center ([www.jp2cc.org](http://www.jp2cc.org)) for their invaluable assistance and recommend that our readers visit this jewel in Washington, D.C., where you can experience the life, teachings, and papal ministry of Pope John Paul II. This facility is a resource of material and information on the most influential pope of modern times, if not since St. Peter himself. More than just an exhibit, the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center is a national treasure like the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which is just across the street, adjacent to Catholic University of America — well worth the visit any time you're in the District of Columbia.

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# Foreword

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**I**n the 20 centuries since Jesus Christ called Simon Peter to follow Him, there have been many popes. Some have been saintly and most others very ordinary men. A very few have been infamously notorious and guilty of every sin under the sun. Some of Peter's successors have imitated that humble fisherman's shame and awe in the face of his miraculous Lord and Savior. Others, filled with Peter's faith, have bravely endured anguish and martyrdom to follow their Master to the last. Some pontiffs convened Ecumenical Councils to fight heresy and clarify doctrine. Some have worked for peace and been condemned for it. Some bishops of Rome have courageously saved their flock from destruction. Others have wielded Peter's sword against the enemies of the Church. Some Holy Fathers made lasting contributions of insight and understanding to moral and doctrinal teachings. Others courageously corrected those who might have led Catholics astray. Some inspired magnificent works of art and architecture that continue to uplift the hearts of all human beings of good will.

In almost 2,000 years of popes, not many people have been so fortunate as to have lived during the papacy of one who would have a major influence on the history of the world and take his place among those who are called great even by those outside the Church. After all his dynamic pilgrimages and lucid encyclicals, his honored accomplishments in art and philosophy, his restoration of unity by strongly shepherding the manifold members of God's people, Pope John Paul II, like St. Peter, ended his earthly journey having his belt tied by others who led him where he did not want to go. At the end of all this glory, we witnessed the sagging eyes and the drooping head of one who was led by illness and pain to endure the cross that his Master had predicted.

I commend Fathers Brighenti, Toborowsky, and Trigilio for their thorough, fair, honest, and candid look into the life, times, thought, and person of Pope John Paul II. This book is not a definitive biography like George Weigel's *Witness to Hope*, but it is a wonderful introduction and appetizer to such a main course. These authors have done a terrific job in summarizing, analyzing, and explaining the man, Karol Wojtyła, and the pope, John Paul II, without resorting to myth and legend. Other books may expose some of his faults and shortcomings or actually sensationalize them by blowing them out of context. *John Paul II For Dummies*, Special Edition, is not a sanitized or saccharin product of propaganda; rather, it is a respectful, intelligent, and sensitive journey into the life, the mind, and the heart of a man who shaped history. Too often, modern biographers feel the need to "humanize" their subject by disclosing embarrassing details, highlighting rare acts of imprudence, or imputing motives. These prolific authors, by no means naïve, present just the facts of what John Paul said and did, leaving judgment where it belongs, with God and with history.



## John Paul II For Dummies

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Glory, praise, and gratitude to Almighty God for this precious gift to the Church and to the world, whom we were blessed to have known as Pope John Paul II!

Rev. Monsignor James Cafone, STD  
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Seton Hall University  
South Orange, New Jersey

# Introduction

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When he died on April 2, 2005, three million people came throughout the next week to pay their respects by visiting his body. Six days after his death, 4 kings, 5 queens, at least 70 presidents and prime ministers, more than 14 leaders of other religions, as well as 157 cardinals, 700 bishops, and 3,000 priests were present at the funeral Mass along with another quarter million faithful crammed into St. Peter's Square. No other person in recent history has had such a tremendous display of respect, honor, and mourning over his life and death as was given to Pope John Paul II. Not only did the more than one billion members of the Catholic Church, which he shepherded for 26 years, grieve his death, but over 200 heads of state sent representatives or went themselves to his funeral.

You don't get such a spectacular exit from this world unless you've done something during your life to merit the admiration and respect of so many. The fact that so many non-Catholics honored the man known as John Paul II attests to his effect on the world — and not just within his own religion.

Here are just few of the statistics that reinforce Pope John Paul II's popularity:

- ✔ He was the first pope in history to visit most of the nations he visited. He traveled 721,052 miles (1,160,421 km), or the equivalent of 31 consecutive trips around the globe, making pastoral trips to 129 countries and 876 cities.
- ✔ Over the course of his papacy, he received 17.6 million visitors at 1,161 general audiences in his own backyard (actually, St. Peter's Square or Pope Paul VI Hall) in Rome.
- ✔ Hundreds of thousands of young people traveled halfway around the world to see him for International World Youth Days. This guy not only got around, he was very popular.

The first non-Italian pope in 450 years and the first Polish pontiff ever, Karol Wojtyła was elected Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pastor of the Catholic Church on October 16, 1978, and took the name Pope John Paul II. He was one of the youngest popes elected, at the age of 58, and had the third longest reign (26 years) from the long list of 266 people (from St. Peter to Benedict XVI) who have held that office.



Just the fact that so many people in the world knew who he was and what he stood for, even if some of them disagreed with him or did not share his principles and convictions, is a testimony to his influence on the world. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin once dismissively remarked, “How many divisions does the pope have?” Both Stalin and Hitler had no time for and showed no respect for Pope Pius XII during World War II, for either the man or the office. Though Pope John Paul II was not able to convert Mikhail Gorbachev or Fidel Castro, he did have the Communist leader of the U.S.S.R. visit him at the Vatican, and he was greeted by the Communist leader of Cuba when he landed in his country for a pastoral visit. Uncle Joe Stalin must have been spinning in his grave.

## *About This Book*

This book is written for anyone and everyone, whether you are Catholic or Protestant; Christian, Jewish, or Muslim; Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist; whether you are of the Shinto, Jainist, Sikh, Confucian, or Baha’i faiths; even if you are agnostic or atheist. Pope John Paul II may not have been the leader of your religion and you may not have agreed with every one of his positions, statements, policies, or decisions, but despite his philosophy and theology, he had an enormous impact on the entire world, and this book explains the impact he had.

Not only do you not have to be Catholic to appreciate or even just to be curious about John Paul II, you can read this book regardless of your faith affiliation or the religion you profess. We don’t sanitize the life of John Paul II — as others have done in the past with other historical figures, so that their lives are more myth than reality. Nor do we sensationalize his weaknesses and shortcomings, attacking the integrity and honor of a person who is no longer alive to defend himself. Instead, we give you an objective, concise, and pertinent overview of his life and the effect he had on the world, on history, and on the church he governed for more than a quarter-century.

This book will help you appreciate the background and roots of the man born and baptized as Karol Wojtyła, as well as his personal struggles and tragedies. We look at what shaped and formed the man, what he did and said before he became pope and as Pope John Paul II — including his numerous visits to foreign nations, his frequent World Youth Days, the prolific number of saints he canonized, the multitude of documents and letters he issued, and the impact his papacy had on the world, from the dissolution of the Soviet Union to defending life in the womb, in the hospital and nursing home, in the battlefield, and even in prison.

That said, this book is a reference, which means you don’t have to read it from beginning to end. You can use the table of contents and the index to find

the information you're most interested in at the moment, dipping into the book as you want to over time. Of course, if you want to read the book cover to cover, that's no sin either!

## Conventions Used in This Book

In this book, you'll find different names referring to the same person. Karol Wojtyła was the name given to the man about whom this book is written. He was baptized with that name as an infant. We use the proper name Karol Wojtyła to refer to him in the days before he was pope. We refer to him as Pope John Paul II, John Paul, or JP2 when we're referring to him during his pontificate, because that's how he was known at that time.

Every pope of the Catholic Church is simultaneously the Bishop of Rome. The two offices are inseparable. But to keep it simple, we just refer to John Paul as pope. We don't use his other titles — Vicar of Christ, Successor of St. Peter, Servant of the Servants of God, Patriarch of the West, Prince of the Apostles, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of Vatican City, Supreme Roman Pontiff, Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church, and His Holiness — to prevent confusion.

Catholic custom is to use the first two words of the original Latin text for any official document, whether a papal letter or a decree from an ecumenical council. We use that same convention and list Pope John Paul II's encyclical letters as they can be found on the Internet or in any library or reference book. For example, *Veritatis Splendor* is Latin for "Splendor of Truth"; it's also the name of a papal encyclical on morality and ethics. When we use these Latin titles, we usually include the English equivalent in parentheses.

*Sacred Scripture* and the *Bible* are synonymous terms in Catholicism, so either one refers to the same thing. We also alternate the use of adjectives like *scriptural* or *biblical*, but both mean the same thing: anything found in either the Old Testament or the New Testament.

To help you navigate through this book, we use the following conventions:

- ✓ We use *italics* for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that we define in parentheses.
- ✓ We use monospace for Web addresses and e-mail addresses. Note that some Web addresses may break across two lines of text. If that happens, rest assured that we haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending the line break doesn't exist.

## *What You're Not to Read*

This book is a reference book, so as we mention earlier, you don't have to read everything. Sidebars, which are text enclosed in a shaded gray box, give you information that's interesting to know but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the chapter or section topic. You can skip them if you're pressed for time, and still get the most important information. You can also skip any text marked by a Technical Stuff icon (see "Icons Used in This Book," later in this Introduction for more information).

## *Foolish Assumptions*

In writing this book, we made some assumptions about you:

- ✔ You're curious about this man who was pope for 26 years, who led over a billion followers, and who traveled around the world more than anyone else in human history.
- ✔ You may not be a Catholic Christian, but you're still intrigued by the faith and witness this man gave in the name of his God and for the service of his church.
- ✔ You may be a Catholic who just wants to know more details about the life, background, ministry, and impact John Paul II had on the world as well as on the Church.
- ✔ You may have no religious affiliation but you have respect and admiration for the man behind the office and want to know more about him as a person.
- ✔ Either you grew up knowing no other pope than John Paul II or you remember the papacies of other popes before JP2.

## *How This Book Is Organized*

This book comes in six parts, consisting of 23 chapters and 2 appendixes, but you can read any one you like and not have to worry if you didn't read the previous chapters. We refer you to other parts of the book to make it easy for you to get a better appreciation and understanding, but each part and each chapter in those parts can work on its own.

## ***Part I: Getting to Know John Paul II***

In this part, we paint the landscape of Pope John Paul II — the background, context, and climate (social, political, and theological) of the place and time he lived. Before we look at the man and the pope, we examine the religious, philosophical, and historical scenery on which the portrait of the life of Karol Wojtyła would be painted. No one is born into an empty, sterile world with no past behind it; likewise, this man from Poland, who would one day become pope and leader of more than a billion Catholic Christians around the globe, was in a sense painted onto an already existing canvas we call *life in the real world*. This part gives you the origin of the man himself, especially before his ecclesiastical career as a priest, bishop, cardinal, and finally pope.

## ***Part II: Continuing the Legacy of Others and the Traditions of the Church***

Karol Wojtyła, the churchman, was unique but at the same time was like other popes, cardinals, bishops, and priests before him and after him as well. This part looks at his pontificate, as a whole, from the beginning of his vocation and seminary training to his priestly career and eventual papal ministry.

Like all popes, he was Supreme Pastor and shepherd of the Universal Church. That meant his job was to be the representative of Christ (literally, Christ's vicar on Earth) to the Church and to the world. The priestly work of sanctifying the people of God with divine grace, the prophetic work of teaching them the faith, and the kingly office of governing and providing sound leadership are expected in the person who has been chosen to this awesome task.

This part examines the role of pope as teacher and as shepherd as he maintains connection and continuity with the past, while addressing the needs and concerns of the present and looking to the promise of the future.

## ***Part III: Putting His Unique Stamp on the Papacy***

What distinguishes Pope John Paul II from other popes, like Paul VI, John XXIII, and Pius XII? This part looks at how JP2 injected his own flavor into the papacy and wore it like a tailor-made suit. We examine his unique contributions and perspectives, his policies and programs, and other aspects that made an impact on the Church and the world, specifically because of his style and his leadership during his 26-year pontificate.

## ***Part IV: Embracing Modernity and Looking to the Future***

Although his theology, philosophy, and ethics were considered mainstream and *orthodox* (that is, consistent with what the official Roman Catholic Church has taught and held for ages), some have erroneously labeled John Paul II doctrinally conservative, morally traditional, and socially progressive. This part examines his use of the modern world, not in embracing its values but in using its technology to communicate his message. A man of his era, John Paul II utilized modern media, modern travel, and modern approaches (like appealing to the younger generation) in fulfilling his role as teacher and pastor of the Universal Church. Finally, we look at his legacy and what lies ahead for his successors, the popes who follow him.

## ***Part V: The Part of Tens***

In this part, you see ten reasons that Pope John Paul II was considered the “people’s pope,” discover ten fascinating and fun facts about him, understand ten of his important papal encyclicals and letters, and identify ten of his notable canonizations. You see the philosopher-theologian in John Paul II show his colors when he writes to the Church around the world about issues of faith and morals. You find out about the missionary and evangelical vein in him that prompted pastoral trips around the world to see the people of his parish — which, as pope, meant the entire planet. You discover little-known facts about this famous man of history and his diverse repertoire of talents, experience, and knowledge. In this part, you get four short chapters that are long on his accomplishments and his influence.

## ***Part VI: Appendixes***

If you have a propensity for statistics, you’ll enjoy the appendixes, which include a chronological timeline of pertinent events in the life of Pope John Paul II, as well as the details of his travel itinerary throughout his papacy.

## ***Icons Used in This Book***

Icons are the fancy little pictures in the margins of this book. Here’s a guide to what they mean and what the icons look like:



This icon marks interesting information that helps you get the inside scoop on JP2.



This icon points out ideas that sum up and reinforce the concepts we discuss. In fact, if you're short on time and can't read an entire section, go straight to this icon. Also, if you need a refresher in a chapter for any reason, you can skim through and read these to reinforce the main points.



Think of this icon as bonus material — the info flagged by this icon gives you some background information that isn't critical. In some cases, this information gives you the brief history of a point, or more detail than is absolutely necessary. We think the information is interesting so we include it — but if you're in a time crunch, you can skip it.

## Where to Go from Here

You can start right in with Chapter 1 and read to the end, or you can use the table of contents and index to find just the bit of information you're looking for.

If you want even more information on JP2, we highly recommend a visit to the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., or a virtual trip to [www.jp2cc.org](http://www.jp2cc.org), where you'll find a vast amount of material on the person and the papacy of JP2. The exhibits and displays are fantastic and are rivaled only by the Vatican Museums themselves in Rome.

If you can't make a trip to the Eternal City (otherwise known as Rome) to visit the Vatican in person, you can go to its Web site and find plenty of information on Pope John Paul II, especially his official writings. Check it out at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/index.htm).

Many good biographies on Pope John Paul II are available, but we personally and highly recommend *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, by George Wiegel. Also very informative are *John Paul the Great: Remembering a Spiritual Father*, by Peggy Noonan, and *John Paul II: A Personal Portrait of the Pope and the Man*, by Ray Flynn. Even though we don't share or agree with all their opinions, interpretations, or inferences, you may also find interesting *Pope John Paul II*, by Tad Szulc, and *His Holiness*, by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi.