



RocketLit

Over 500 More Free Articles
in History and Science
are waiting to engage
your students at

[Rocketlit.com](https://www.Rocketlit.com)





Problems with the Catholic Church in the 1500s

corruption, clergy, indulgences, salvation

European Reformation Unit

Your older brother storms into the house, slamming the door behind him.

"What's wrong?" your mom asks, looking worried.

"It's my boss, he is being so unfair!" He stomps around the house for at least ten minutes, complaining about all the trouble that he is having at work. His boss likes some of the workers more than the others, and he has been giving them special treatment -- the people his boss likes are paid more and get to leave early.

This is not the first time this has happened in history. Your brother's boss sounds a lot like the Pope during the Middle Ages. The Pope is the leader of the Catholic Church. Throughout the Middle Ages, there was only one Christian Church, and the Pope was in charge of it all. He lived in Rome, but he still had power over all of Europe!

Think about if your brother worked at the only supermarket in town. It would not matter what people wanted to buy -- they would have to come to that supermarket if they wanted eggs, potatoes, or cheese. Because the Catholic Church was everywhere, it was a part of people's lives everywhere. It did not matter if you lived in France, or in England, or in Germany -- you depended on the Catholic Church. If you wanted to get baptized, or get married, or hold a funeral when someone died, you needed to go through the Church. In that way, it was a lot like the only supermarket in town.

If there were only one supermarket, that would mean your brother's boss would have a lot of power. He could even change the prices of all the things that people needed. Just like your brother's boss has a lot

of power, so did the Pope in Rome. Since he was in charge of the Church, he was also in charge of who was baptized, married, and more. The kings and queens knew this, so they would ask him for his opinion and give him fancy gifts. They definitely did not want to make the Pope mad!

The Pope stayed powerful all through the Middle Ages. Around the beginning of the 16th century CE, people began to notice problems. Just like your brother's boss can give favors to people that he likes, the Pope was starting to give special favors to people who did not really deserve them. Usually these people would give him money or gifts, just like the Kings and Queens. **Corruption** is when someone in power is not honest and does things because people pay them money to do them. Some of these things could be good for the people, but most of them will be dishonest and not good for the people they serve.

The Pope was not the only one who was corrupt in the Catholic Church. The priests, who worked for the Pope, also knew that they had a lot of power. The people who your brother's boss likes probably do not work very hard -- they know that they will make more money and get longer breaks no matter what they do. The priests of the Catholic Church were the same way. Many of them were lazy, or could not even read, or were very rich even though people around them were poor. **Clergy** are leaders of the Catholic Church, such as priests, bishops, or the Pope. In the 1600s people were not very happy with them because many of them cared more about money than the people they were supposed to help. Many people were even able to pay for high positions in the clergy to get more power for their family!

The Pope did favors for people who were giving him money. Sometimes the Pope would let people get divorced even though the Church believed that was a sin. What about when rich people would do bad things that were a sin? Well, the Church would sell things that they said would forgive the sin. The Church believed that there was a punishment for sins, but not when people paid money to have the sin forgiven. **Indulgences** were a pardon sold by the Church to people who wanted to take away punishment for their sins. It might not surprise you that rich people would buy a lot of these and this would bring a lot of money into the Church.

Now having one of two sins forgiven may not be a big deal, but the real problem came with people who did this over and over. The Church believes that the only way you can get to heaven is with the help of God and the Church. During this time, people were able to spend money on indulgences to forgive them for their sins. The idea of paying money to get into heaven goes against a lot of what the Church was supposed to stand for. **Salvation** is being saved from your "sins," or being freed. This was very important to people who were a part of the Church. It seemed that the more money you had, the more likely you were to being "saved" and most people did not like this one bit.

Just like your brother is upset with his boss because of all the unfair things he is doing, people in the 16th century were very upset with the Pope because of the unfair things he was doing. They began to talk about all the ways that the Pope and the clergy were abusing their power, and they began to call for

change. When change finally happened, it would change the history of the Catholic Church for years to come.

References:

The History Learning Site. "The Roman Catholic Church in 1500"• historylearningsite.co.uk, 2016. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/the-counter-reformation/the-roman-catholic-church-in-1500/>

History. "Martin Luther and the 95 Theses"• history.com, 2009. <http://www.history.com/topics/martin-luther-and-the-95-theses>

Encyclopædia Britannica. "Indulgence"• *britannica.com*, 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/indulgence>