

How far was personal  
gain the motivation  
for imperial princes to  
join luther's re...



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The imperial princes controlled large areas of land under the emperor some were spiritual princes- archbishops and bishops, such as the archbishop on Mainz, whilst others were rich noblemen, as the emperor was unable to control the princes, there were many independent states within the empire each in control of their own affairs. During the 6th[16th surely!] century the large majority of the princes of independent states became Lutheran In this essay we will look at what they would gain from joining Luther's reformation and how far this would motivate them to do so and also other factors that would motivate them to join and which gave the most motivation to do so. Sound basic background.

Princes stood to gain lot personally including more land and money as they could take the land and goods owned by the church and monasteries for themselves or to sell and make a profit. Under Luther's beliefs this was justified as the authority of the pope in general was questioned, but it was certain he had no power over secular law and land. This would motivate the Imperial Princes to support Luther as they would greatly benefit from the change in authority; an example of this is Albrecht of Hohenzollern, who was the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, who controlled land from Eastern Poland up to the Baltic State of Estonia. When he officially became Lutheran in 1525 he shut down the order of knights and took all their land for himself. A nice clear point, well made and argued with a good example. Becoming Lutheran would mean not having to pay the high church taxes which In the 16th Century Germany were some of the highest taxes in Europe.

For most princes this meant suffering economies had a much brighter future, for merchants in these states and even peasants it was a welcome. So when <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-was-personal-gain-the-motivation-for-imperial-princes-to-join-luthers-reformation/>

Luther call for an end to the taxes and the selling of indulgences was warmly welcomed by all. It also presented the opportunity for the princes to raise their own taxes and gain more profit for themselves. Again clear and sensible. The increase in land and money meant an increase in power which during the 16th century was certainly something a ruler would change beliefs for allowing a greater power and status for their family and still legal under Luther's beliefs as the church had no right to own any land or expensive possessions due to their vow of poverty.

There increased power allowed the princes to then pay mercenaries to fight local, weaker, princes and gain there land too adding to their already growing power and making the emperor weaker lessen his control over the states, mainly in north and east Germany where Lutheranism was most common. Frederick ' the Wise' of Saxony protected Luther from the Emperor and even hid him in his castle of Wartburg after the Diet of Worms in 1521, where Luther was put under an Imperial Ban by Emperor Charles V. However Frederick never became Lutheran; and died, as a ' good' Catholic, in 1525; leading some historians to think that he had used Luther, for his own personal gain; as a political tool to maintain his power and position over the Holy Roman Emperor. however some people may say that personal gain was not the motivation, or at least the main motivation, for Imperial Princes to convert to Lutheranism.

Many converted simply because they had a genuine belief in his ideas. across Germany people were switching to Luther's ideas, seeing more faults in the Catholic Church in Germany. For example, the abuses within the Catholic Church, and in particular, the selling of indulgences throughout <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-was-personal-gain-the-motivation-for-imperial-princes-to-join-luthers-reformation/>

Germany that led to the building of a new St. Peter's Church in Rome. Careful the Church argued that indulgences were perfectly fine, Lutherans argued they were an abuse. You need to say that many Germans viewed them as an abuse and Luther's opposition to them won him converts.

Imperial princes were likely to have had some kind of education, and so would have been able to read Luther's works such as "To the Nobility of the German Nation", which questions the power of the Church and the Papacy, or "On the Freedom of the Christian Man", which sets out clearly his beliefs on Salvation. The reading of these documents along with the Bible would help the Imperial Princes, and other nobles understand Luther's beliefs for themselves leading to them seeing the need for reform within the Church, and supporting his Reformation, but without seeking the personal gain for themselves. Good, sensible use of Luther's works. If a prince's people supported Luther and wanted to see a change within the Catholic Church then it would be hard for them, as the Ruler, to ignore their views. Risking the threat of loss of lands or even a Revolution if they did choose to ignore their people's wishes was likely to lead a ruler to follow his people's wishes. In Wittenberg in 1521-22 the people decided that they wanted a change in the Church, as here ruler did not allow it they proceeded to reform the Church themselves by removing images from the Churches and using vernacular Bibles, as Luther suggested should be done.

North and East of Germany were the furthest away from the power of Charles V, whose family owned land in the Netherlands and Austria. This was also where there was a greater support for Martin Luther and his

Reformation of the Catholic Church. Suggesting that the Princes in those  
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areas were more likely to support Luther and his beliefs due the pressure they would feel to do so, like the rest of their area had done. Not wanting to cause arguments and disputes between neighboring Lutheran States. And gaining more independence by going against the emperor, who was a strong catholic, which was what most imperial states wanted. In conclusion I feel that although some of the Imperial Princes may have supported Luther for their own reasons including genuine belief.

Many of them will have sought some kind of personal gain out of showing their support for Martin Luther and his Reformation of the Catholic Church in Europe. Although personal gain may not have been the only reason it I likely to be high on any rulers list that did reform if not at the top. I'm not 100% convinced by this conclusion, it is not in enough depth to be conclusive. Overall a fine piece of work.

You pick lots of relevant points and you give them lots of detailed explanation and examples. You show a deep knowledge and clear understanding of the period. A very good effort.