

## 2.2 RELIGION IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

### ? FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- The study of culture prepares students to ask and answer questions such as: What is culture?
- What roles does culture play in human and societal development?
- How is unity developed within and among cultures?
- What is the role of diversity, and how is it maintained within a culture?
- What is the role of religion in a society?
- How does culture change over time to accommodate different religions and beliefs?

### STANDARD #1 CULTURE.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson will focus on the practice of religion in Germany today. After reviewing the provisions of the Basic Law regarding religion, students will read about the growth of Islam and Judaism in Germany in the last sixty years and discuss the impact of pluralism on religion in German society. They will have the opportunity to do research about religions and present their findings in a creative project.

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Religion has always played a major role in German history. The actions of Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk from Wittenberg, resulted in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and splintered powerful Christianity in Europe. Today almost two-thirds of Germany's population claim affiliation with either Roman Catholicism or the Protestant Evangelical Church. In 2005 the Conclave of Cardinals elected Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, a German, as head of the Roman Catholic Church for the first time in 482 years as Pope Benedict XVI. However, growing pluralism and increasing secularization typify the religious landscape in Germany.

Islam is the largest minority religion in Germany. There are almost four million Muslims. It has gained importance through migration. The large majority of Muslims in Germany are of Turkish origin, followed by smaller groups from southeast Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Although there has been a Muslim population since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the major influx resulted from the "guest worker" program of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Before World War II, over one-half million Jews lived in Germany; following the Holocaust only a few thousand returned. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellites in the 1990's, Jewish immigration has resulted in growing numbers, ranging from ultra-orthodox to reform congregations. Statistics vary on the exact number of Jews who live in Germany. In 2009, the Central Council of Jews in Germany reported that 120,000 people were members of Jewish communities in Germany,



and that about 220,000 Jews had emigrated to Germany from eastern Europe in the previous twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps due to the legacy of communist rule and official GDR advancement of an atheistic world-view in eastern Germany, both religious observance and affiliation seem to be lower there than in the rest of the nation.

Germany's Basic Law guarantees that "freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, shall be inviolable." There is no state religion, but the state and religious communities cooperate on a basis of partnership. For example, the government contributes financially to denominational kindergartens and schools that are run by the religious communities. The religious communities levy a tax on members. This tax, collected by the state and commonly referred to as the "church tax" or *Kirchensteuer*, is used to fund personnel, administration, social services, and other expenses.

1 (2009). *Central Council of Jews in Germany*. Retrieved September 1, 2012 from: <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/article/2646.html>.

## TIME:



(2-3) 45 minute class periods

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- German Basic Law Handout (**Handout 2.2.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Religion in Germany Information Packet (**Handout 2.2.2 on the Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Socratic Seminar (**Handout 2.2.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- *Living Side by Side* and *Assessing Religion* Articles (**Handout 2.2.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Religion in Germany Cube Project (**Handout 2.2.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- *Germans Wary as Mosque Rises in Cologne* Article (**Handout 2.2.6 on Instructional Resource Disc**)

## PROCEDURE:



**Note:** The topic of religion can be a controversial one in many schools. The purpose of this lesson is to teach about the basic religious groups that co-exist in contemporary German society, not any religious doctrine.

### DAY 1:

**Anticipatory Set:** The teacher should ask the students about the Constitutional provisions regarding religious practice in the United States. What does the separation of church and state mean? How many religious groups are represented in their community? In their school? Are the schools closed for religious holidays?

Next, the teacher should introduce the subject of religion in Germans. The teacher should review and distribute the appropriate articles of the Basic Law (**Handout 2.2.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**), and the Religion in Germany Information Packet (**Handout 2.2.2 on the Instructional Resource Disc**). The students should review the included information. The major activity of the lesson will be a Socratic Seminar based on the careful reading of two articles by Joel Gehringer, a journalism student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln: "Living Side by Side" and "Assessing Religion: Measures of Involvement Differ from those of US" (**Handout 2.2.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**). The teacher should distribute the articles and ask the students to begin a careful reading in class and to complete the assignment for homework. If the teacher is not familiar with a Socratic Seminar, there are numerous websites that describe the purposes, the procedures, scoring rubrics, etc. As the students read the articles, they should underline significant lines or passages and also write down open-ended questions that can serve as a ticket to participate in the Seminar in the next class period. The teacher should review the methodology of a Socratic Seminar (**Handout 2.2.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**) with the students, so they can begin immediately the next day.

### DAY 2:

The teacher should serve as the facilitator for a Socratic Seminar on Religion in Germany (**Handout 2.2.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**) based upon the students' reading of the two companion articles by Joel Gehringer. The teacher should collect

the questions which the students have submitted and should be prepared with some to lead off the discussion. Some suggestions are:

- “What is the role of religion in contemporary society?”
- “How has religion changed in Germany in the past twenty-five years?”
- “Can Christians, Muslims and Jews co-exist in Germany?”
- “Do Christians and Jews in Germany see Islam as both a social and political power? As a cultural or ideological threat?”
- “Is there a real separation of church and state in Germany?”
- “Do German religious groups have any special responsibility to respond to international social issues given their country’s history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?”

### DAY 3:

The teacher should ask the students to assess the Socratic Seminar of the previous day and to summarize the salient points of the discussion. Can the students reach any consensus on the role of religion in German society? As a follow-up assignment to bring closure to the topic, the students should complete the Religion in Germany Cube Project (**Handout 2.2.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**). This is a creative way to illustrate religion in Germany today: on each face of the cube, the students should concentrate on a different facet: Basic Law, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism, atheism. There can be many variations.

### WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- Having completed the Socratic Seminar and completed the Religion in Germany Cube Project (**Handout 2.2.5 on Instructional Resource Disc**) (with its prerequisite research), the teacher should pose the following question for discussion: *Now that we have studied the diversity of religions in contemporary Germany in the context of religious freedom guaranteed in the Basic Law, should the German school calendar be changed to eliminate school closings based on Christian holidays?*

### MODIFICATIONS:

- Rather than the Religions in Germany Cube assignment, the teacher may substitute an individual or group PowerPoint assignment or a poster assignment. If the Socratic Seminar is not a viable strategy for the class, then the teacher may substitute reading the articles and answering teacher-generated questions.
- Another question that the teacher might wish to introduce for discussion is, “Should the German *Bundestag* pass legislation (as the French did) to regulate religious dress (i.e. clothing associated with religious observance) in public?”

### EXTENSION:

- The teacher may assign students research projects on the growth of Neo-Nazism, antisemitism and Islamophobia in Germany and actions to combat these hate-movements. The final product could take the form of an essay, oral presentation, PowerPoint presentation, dramatization, etc. The teacher might direct the students to research the current status of mosques in Cologne, after reading the article *Germans Wary as Mosque Rises in Cologne* from the Christian Science Monitor (**Handout 2.2.6 on Instructional Resource Disc**) or to the website for the Dresden-based Network for Democracy and Courage (<http://www.netzwerk-courage.de>)



### Sources:

German Information Center USA. (n.d.). *Facts About Germany*. Retrieved 2011, from <http://www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de/en/society/content/background/churches-and-religious-communities.html>

(2009). *Central Council of Jews in Germany*. Retrieved September 1, 2012 from: <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/article/2646.html>.