



History & Religion

Samer G. Zabaneh was project coordinator of "History & Religion", a youth Exchange project, implemented in Amman, Jordan from 14 to 22 July 2005 by the Young Women Christian Association of Amman (Y.W.C.A). This project comes under the thematic priority 'Combating Racism and Xenophobia "Religion". He gives us a full report of this project, which gathered 56 participants from ten countries from both shores of the Mediterranean.

We realised the importance of living together in spite of our differences in a respectful atmosphere. History proves our idea, as well as archaeological sites which have evidences of peaceful coexistence where there were different religions mixed in a homogeneous way. Thus, we explored how religions coexisted peacefully throughout the world, from past to present.

There is much evidence of religions through historical and archaeological sites in Jordan. Some of these sites have evidence of old religions such as Nabatiens in Petra to Romans in Jarash to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We visited Petra, Madaba, Mount Nebo, Baptism site, Umayyad Islamic desert castles, Wadi Rum and the Dead Sea.

No less than 56 participants from different cultures, religions and backgrounds from 10 countries: Italy, Germany, UK, Spain, France, Poland, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Palestine. They were between 16 and 25-years-old, apart from the team leaders. There was at least one Muslim and one Christian from each country, except Poland whose participants were all Christian and Turkey whose were all Muslim. We had three main aims: to show the coexistence between the different religions; to point out the similarities of historical and theological context of different religions; to illustrate



that religion is a factor in building people's lives through history.

There were many activities, both theoretical and practical during the project. Participants listened to lectures from a priest and an Iman (Islamic Sheikh) on Christianity and Islam in Jordan. Participants presented their opinions and the stereotypes they may have had on other religions and used different types of art to break down the barriers between them. Each country presented the situation of religions in their countries and discussed their similarities. They also held 'religion stories' workshops, where they presented different stories from the Bible and the Quran. Finally, we visited some of the archaeological sites, holding religious evidence, to connect what the participants knew about religion with the place to make the idea clearer through making them live inside the evidence of the history.

To conclude, we can say that our youth exchange has produced several concrete and productive outcomes. It is fair to say that a very strong relationships between the partici-

pants emerged and stronger contacts with their organisations were made for future work. Thanks to the numerous visits we made, the participants saw the reality of local life in Jordan and how different religions lived together in peace. They went to a street where the Mosque and the Church are only a few metres apart. Participants and leaders decided to do a follow up with the same participants next year on the same project in another country.

Last but certainly not least, two participants from different countries (Jordan and France) who met during the exchange got engaged a few months afterwards.



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