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Pope lifts up the other face of the Middle East in Lebanon

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 17, 2012

Beirut, Lebanon ? Some papal trips are important for their substance, while others matter more for their symbolism. Benedict XVI?s Sept. 14-16 outing to Lebanon fell into that second category, showing the world a different face of the Middle East in a moment of mounting violence and deep doubts about the future of the Arab Spring.

As Lebanon?s *Daily Star* put it, the trip came off as a ?symbol of tolerance? in a region whose profile is more often that of fundamentalism, terrorism, and sectarian strife.

Benedict arrived on the very day that the recent bout of anti-American and anti-Western violence reached its peak, and while a bloody civil war in neighboring Syria continued to rage ? neither of which were on the horizon when plans for the trip were originally crafted.

In that context, the focus shifted. Originally, the trip seemed calculated to deliver a shot in the arm to the Christian minority of the Middle East, in decline and full of anxiety about its future. As events unfolded, however, both the pope and his Lebanese hosts seemed determined to use the outing to accomplish something more pressing ? to illustrate that the Middle East is not exclusively defined by radicalism and the ?clash of civilizations.?

NCR senior correspondent John L. Allen Jr. traveled with Pope Benedict XVI to Lebanon. Here is a list of stories Allen covered during the pope?s visit.

Papal charge to Middle East Christians: 'Be peacemakers!' [1], Sep. 16, 2012

On trip about unity, Catholic division a striking omission [2], Sep. 16, 2012

Strong words but no shift in substance on Syria [3], Sep. 16, 2012

Archbishop (gently) corrects pope on Arab Spring [4], Sep. 15, 2012

Pope tackles elephant in room of Christian exodus [5], Sep. 15, 2012

Muslims want Christians in Middle East, mufti tells pope [6], Sep. 15, 2012

New papal bumper sticker: If we want peace, defend life! [7], Sep. 15, 2012

Transcript of pope en route to Lebanon [8], Sep. 14, 2012

Pope's trip showcases another face of the Middle East [9], Sep. 14, 2012

In Lebanon, pope mixes bitter and sweet [10], Sep. 14, 2012

'Statehood for Palestine now', patriarch tells pope [11], Sep. 14, 2012

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With world on the brink, can Benedict be a firebreak? [13], Sep. 13, 2012

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