

Education Is the Cure for "Islamophobia"

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At a press conference on Friday (Sept. 10) in which he spoke to a variety of issues, President Obama took time to appeal for tolerance toward Islam. On the day before the anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attacks and confronted by conflict over a proposed New York mosque, Obama reminded the nation that Muslim Americans are "our fellow citizens."



"The inflammatory rhetoric and the confrontation need to be managed somehow," Guy Beck says. "The more the debate gets fired up, the more out of control it gets. That's the danger." (Photo by Guy Beck)

Education and an open dialogue would go a long way toward achieving the kind of tolerance the president is calling for, says Guy Beck, an adjunct assistant professor of [religious studies](#). He also has taught courses in Islam and the Qur'an at Loyola University.

"People should get educated about what the Qur'an teaches," Beck says. "The roots of the religion taught in the Qur'an are the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), rabbinic Judaism, early Christianity and to some extent pre-Islamic Persian religion Zoroastrianism."

"The biblical revelation should be familiar to most people in the West. The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, is understood to be in the line of biblical prophets. People really have to unpack the text and see what's really there; then they can confront someone else and have an intellectual debate, instead of a fiery emotional one."

Calling it a "volatile situation," Beck says that the Sept. 11 anniversary allowed campaigning politicians and some political pundits to shape the conversation for self-serving purposes, playing on the fear of Americans who may not have the information necessary to frame the debate, and inciting what he calls "Islamophobia."

"It is difficult to enter into a proper debate unless people have an intellectual grasp of the religion," Beck says.

He calls for public forums and discussions led by religious leaders from multiple faiths to lay bare misconceptions that can fuel conflict.

"That kind of public awareness would be invaluable," Beck says. "Inviting ministers, rabbis and imams to discuss the scriptures and some of the real issues that are there in the texts ? that is more the American way."