

Opening the Qur'an: Introducing Islam's Holy Book
by Walter H. Wagner, University of Notre Dame Press 2008.

Many books have been written about Islam, from its origins to its most modern incarnations, since Islamist terrorists attacked America in September 2001. Some have been apologia for the 'real' Islam, in contradistinction to the Islamist, or Salafi, version; others have been polemics against Islam. There have been surveys of Islamic History, analyses of Islamic movements, assessments of Muslim countries, and countless books about Islamist terrorists and terrorism. The other main, related field is that of books about the Qur'an. Two of the many that stand out for me are Professor Mona Siddiqui's *How to Read the Qur'an* (2007) and Ziauddin Sirdar's excellent *Reading the Qur'an* (2011).

Opening the Qur'an, by the adjunct professor of history and biblical studies at the Moravian College and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Walter Wagner, was published in 2008, but only recently came to my attention, hence this late-ish review.

The text is sub-divided into three sections, *Approaching the Qur'an*, *The Qur'an Opened*, *The Ever-Open Qur'an*, is copiously annotated and carries an excellent bibliography. It is clear that Professor Wagner is not afraid to consider some of the most challenging aspects and teachings of the Qur'an, challenging, that is, to Western secular or Judaeo-Christian minds, and it also appears to be the case that he is genuinely committed to bringing a clearer, more balanced perspective on the Qur'an to a sceptical readership.

For those who want to get to know the Qur'an in broad brush strokes this is probably not the right book, but for those who have already done some reading about Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular, and wish to take their knowledge to a higher level this is a most suitable companion.

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