

Was Winnie-the-Pooh a Good Muslim?

An application of Muslim Hermeneutics
to a Bear of Very Little Brain

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Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	Is God to be Found in Winnie-the-Pooh?	4
2.1	Submission to God's Will	5
2.2	Humility	6
3.	The Five Pillars of Islam	6
3.1	The First Pillar: <i>Shahada</i> (Declaration of Faith)	7
3.2	The Second Pillar: <i>Salat</i> (Prayer)	7
3.3	The Third Pillar: <i>Zakat</i> (Almsgiving)	8
3.4	The Fourth Pillar: <i>Sawm</i> (Fasting)	9
3.5	The Fifth Pillar: <i>Hajj</i> (Pilgrimage)	10
4.	Other Islamic Practices	11
4.1	Ritual Cleansing (<i>wudu</i>)	11
4.2	Clean Foods	12
4.3	Reprimanding Sinners	13
5.	The Six Major Beliefs of Islam	14
5.1	Belief in God	14
5.2	Belief in the Prophets	14

6.	Deeper Significances	15
6.1	Winnie-the-Pooh, Teacher of Islam	16
6.2	Winnie-the-Pooh, Prophet of Islam	17
6.2.1	A Warner	17
6.2.2	Rebuilder of the Sacred house	18
6.2.3	Speaker of Prophetic Utterances	19
7.	Conclusion	21
8.	Postscript: Of Heffalumps and Hermeneutics	21
8.1	Heffalumps Everywhere: The Dangers of Selective Interpretation	22
8.2	Chasing Woozles: Reading in Circles	23
8.3	Summary	24
9.	Bibliography	26

1. Introduction

In recent years a growing trend among many Muslims has been to make the claim that Jesus was a ‘good Muslim’¹. Others have described him as ‘a prophet of Islam’. Their method has been simple: by mining the New Testament Gospels they have sought to show that Jesus fasted, prostrated when he prayed, gave to the poor, and a wide range of other Islamic practices. Some have even tried to claim that Jesus gave instructions about how to conduct oneself when on *hajj*.²

The question we want to address in this short paper is *why stop with Jesus?* Why not see if one can demonstrate that other famous literary or historical figures were also Muslim? It is in that light that we have settled upon one of the world’s most famous literary figures as a test case; we refer to none other than Winnie-the-Pooh. Literary giant,³ poet in his own right,⁴ screen star,⁵ philosopher⁶ and hero to millions of children,⁷ could it be that the secret of Pooh’s success lay in daily submission to Allah?

The method we will apply to decide whether or not Winnie-the-Pooh was a good Muslim is the same that the likes of Rahman and McElwain have applied to Jesus. We will comb the two major works of *sunnat al-ursine* that have been transmitted to us for any clues that Pooh held Islamic beliefs or engaged in Islamic practices.⁸ If enough examples can be found, then perhaps we can look forward to such works of erudition as *The Muslim Pooh*, *Mysteries of the Bear*, or *The Gospel of Piglet* springing forth from the pens of Muslim authors in years to come. Let us now turn to the texts before us.

2. Is God to be found in Winnie-the-Pooh?

The hermeneutical key to reading *Winnie-the-Pooh* (forthwith simply WTP) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (THAPC) from an Islamic perspective is to begin by understanding where Allah is to be found within them. For if one was to read the two books quickly, one might end up asking ‘where is God?’ The answer is that Allah’s presence in these books is metaphorically symbolised by the figure of Christopher Robin. This kind of metaphorical device has a long tradition in Western literature and the symbolism can be easily demonstrated. Let us begin with the map (WTP, xii-xiii) on which can immediately see that Christopher Robin’s House *lies in the East*. What stronger clue could this be that the House

¹ e.g. Muhammad ‘Ata Ur-Rahim, *Jesus: A Prophet of Islam* (London: MWH, 1979).

² Thomas McElwain, *Islam in the Bible* (Minerva Press, 1998).

³ An Amazon.com search lists over 2,000 books about or related to him.

⁴ Examples of his own poetry litter the pages of *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*. Whilst these await a thorough form or source critical study, most scholars agree that they go back to the historical Pooh; Muslims will be impressed with the single *isnad* (Pooh-Milne).

⁵ e.g. *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* (Disney Studios, 1977). Altogether he and his Companions have featured in some 20 films.

⁶ e.g. J. T. Williams, *Pooh and the Philosophers* (London: Egmont, 2003). Williams persuasively argues that the whole of Western philosophy is nothing but a prologue to Pooh’s profound wisdom.

⁷ A Google search on 19 February 2004 listed 1,220,000 pages.

⁸ These two works have both been transmitted by A. A. Milne. The editions consulted were *Winnie the Pooh* (London: Methuen, 1975) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (London: Egmont, 2003).

is none other than the Ka'aba and Christopher Robin symbolic of Allah himself?⁹ Furthermore, we are told that Christopher Robin 'lived at the very top of the forest', so high that 'the [rain] water couldn't come up to *his* house' (WTP, 125). Christopher Robin is also portrayed as being omnipresent:

Christopher Robin had spent the morning indoors going to Africa and back.
(THAPC, 8)

Going to Africa and back in one morning whilst remaining indoors would be impossible for a mere human, however for Allah all things are possible. We also discover that Christopher Robin is omniscient:

'Does Christopher Robin know about you?' [asked Pooh]
'Of course he does', said Tigger.
(THAPC, 20)

It is implicit that Christopher Robin knows everything.¹⁰

So, in summary, Christopher Robin's house is in the East, he is above the world, far beyond the reach of rain and weather, he knows everything, and can travel anywhere he wants in an instant. Thus his character symbolically represents God. Establishing the existence of this metaphor will help us as we explore whether Winnie-the-Pooh was a good Muslim.

2.1 Submission to God's Will

It goes without saying that a primary characteristic of a Muslim is submission to God's will. Indeed, the very word 'Islam' comes from the Arabic root S-L-M (to submit) and the Qur'an regularly instructs believers to submit to Allah. One mark of submission is the recognition that everything comes from God and that created beings own nothing:

Then this came into his head suddenly:
Here is a myst'ry
About a little fir-tree
Owl says its *his* tree.
And Kanga says its *her* tree
'Which doesn't make sense,' said Pooh, 'because Kanga doesn't live in a tree.'
(THAPC, 88-89)

Here we see Pooh clearly reflecting on this fact; he acknowledges that any claim by anybody to own anything is laughable. That this is Islamic thinking rather than, say, some kind of Marxist epistemological framework, becomes clear when one considers it alongside other evidences of Pooh's submission. For example:

⁹ A clue to Pooh's religion is also found on this map — note that in the small drawing on the left of the page, he is facing the Sacred House in the East.

¹⁰ It also seems clear that Tigger was spontaneously created by divine fiat (THAPC, 18-20).

‘So, perhaps,’ he said sadly to himself, ‘Christopher Robin won’t tell me any more,’ and he wondered if being a Faithful Knight meant that you just went on being faithful without being told things.’
(THAPC, 172)

Here Pooh reflects on the nature of being a servant of Allah — the willingness to simply live with what you are told and not to ask questions. The simplicity of the axiom is poignant and could easily have flowed from the pen of many a pious Muslim. Winnie-the-Pooh acknowledged Allah’s possession of everything, that knowledge (*‘ilm*) only comes from God and that the duty of a servant is not to ask questions. What better sign could there be that Winnie-the-Pooh was a Muslim?

2.2 Humility

A further sign of Winnie-the-Pooh’s deep Islamic faith comes when one considers his constant humility. An important qur’anic virtue, humility is the mark of a true servant of God, one who knows his place and does not wish to fall foul of the sin of pride.

‘What does Crustimoney Proseedcake mean?’ said Pooh. ‘For I am a Bear of Very Little Brain, and long words bother me.’
(WTP, 45)

‘I don’t see much sense in that’, said Rabbit.
‘No,’ said Pooh humbly, ‘there isn’t. But there was *going* to be when I began it. It’s just that something happened to it on the way.’
(THAPC, 119)

Pooh’s humility is clearly evident on every page. From his favourite epithet (‘I am a Bear of Very Little Brain’) to his willingness to accept correction from Rabbit and his other Companions, his humility is an example to us all. It is also another clue that Winnie-the-Pooh was, indeed, a Muslim.

3. The Five Pillars of Islam

So far, then, we have demonstrated that Pooh lived his life in an attitude of submission to Allah. He was also a deeply humble individual. But this by itself is not enough evidence. What would provide us with more concrete evidence would be if we could demonstrate that Winnie-the-Pooh practiced the five pillars of Islam: *shahada* (declaration of faith), *salat* (prayer), *zakat* (almsgiving), *sawm* (fasting) and *hajj* (pilgrimage).

3.1 The First Pillar: *Shahada* (Declaration of Faith)

There are numerous examples throughout WTP and THAPC of Pooh submitting to, following, and witnessing to his companions about Christopher Robin, who we have clearly seen represents Allah metaphorically. But there is also a more direct confession of Pooh's faith:

The first person he thought of was Christopher Robin [= Allah].
(WTP, 7)

What clearer evidence of Pooh's faith could there be than this? The first person always on his mind was his Master and Lord. Whilst the story of Pooh's actual reversion to Islam is not recorded for us,¹¹ we do have this and many other examples of him publicly declaring his faith.

3.2 The Second Pillar: *Salat* (Prayer)

As a good Muslim, Pooh would have prayed on regular occasions, facing the Sacred House in the East (cf. the map in WTP, xii). He testified to the fact that regular prayer was part of his daily routine:

'Well,' said Pooh, 'at eleven o'clock — at eleven o'clock — well, at eleven o'clock, you see, I generally get home about then. Because I have One or Two Things to Do.'
(WTP, 81)

This clearly refers to the third of the five daily prayers, although given that we do not know the exact latitude at which Pooh lived (nor in which years) it is hard to say which of the various methods of calculating prayer times he followed. But we do have good evidence of his prayer posture — like any good Muslim, Pooh bowed and prostrated. Being somewhat overweight, he did find bowing a little tricky:

'Oh help!' [Pooh said] as he tried to reach his toes.
(WTP, 19)¹²

An example of prostration can also be seen, together with hints that Pooh struggled learning Arabic after becoming a Muslim:

I lay on my tum

¹¹ We are told that Pooh 'lived in a forest all by himself under the name of Sanders' (WTP, 2). Therefore it seems likely that he followed standard Islamic practice and adopted a convert name. Thus Winnie-the-Pooh was his birth-name, but Sanders his adopted Islamic name. This is probably derived from the Arabic root SND meaning *to lean upon*, clearly referring to Pooh's belief that as a Muslim he leant upon Allah.

¹² This page also helpfully indicates Pooh's prayer posture for us with an illustration.

And I tried to hum.
But nothing particular seemed to come.
My face was flat
On the floor ...
(THAPC, 135)

It is surely deeply significant that Winnie-the-Pooh followed the same prayer practice as millions of Muslims around the world do today. He not only witnessed to God, but prayed to him regularly and did so in an attitude of submission, bowed or prostrated.

3.3 The Third Pillar: *Zakat* (Almsgiving)

The figure of 2.5% is generally agreed upon by Islamic scholars as the percentage of their income that a righteous Muslim should donate to the poor and the needy. In deciding whether or not Winnie-the-Pooh gave this amount we face several methodological difficulties: what was the currency used in the One Hundred Acre Wood? How much did Pooh earn? What was the financial value of the gifts to the poor that he made? These questions make it difficult to be precise. However, what can be said with complete certainty was that Pooh regularly gave to the poor, notably one of the poorest and most downtrodden of his community, Eeyore the donkey.

'It's bad enough,' said Eeyore, almost breaking down, 'being miserable myself, what with no presents and no cake and no candles, and no proper notice taken of me at all, but if everybody else is going to be miserable too —'
This was too much for Pooh. 'Stay here!' he called to Eeyore, as he turned and hurried back home as quickly as he could; for he felt that he must get poor Eeyore a present of *some* sort at once, and he could always think of a proper one afterwards.'
(WTP, 69)

Deeply moved by Eeyore's tale of birthday woes, Pooh could simply have commiserated. He could have prayed with Eeyore. He could have gone and rebuked the others for their failure to remember Eeyore's special day. But no, charitable practitioner that he was, Pooh's first instinct was his Islamic duty of giving to the poor. Home he ran and:

The first thing Pooh did was to go to the cupboard to see if had quite a small jar of honey left; and he had, so he took it down.
'I'm giving this to Eeyore,' he explained [to Piglet], 'as a present. What are you going to give?'
(WTP, 71)

A second example of Pooh's generosity to Eeyore came in the depths of the following winter. The snow lay thick upon the ground and the plummeting temperature caused Pooh to worry about his friend:

'I've been thinking,' said Pooh, 'and what I've been thinking about is this. I've been thinking about Eeyore.'

'What about Eeyore?'

'Well, poor Eeyore has nowhere to live.'

'Nor he has,' said Piglet.

'You have a house, Piglet, and I have a house, and they are very good houses. And Christopher Robin has a house, and Owl and Kanga and Rabbit have houses, and even Rabbit's friends and relations have houses or somethings, but poor Eeyore has nothing. So what I've been thinking is: Let's build him a house.'

'That,' said Piglet, 'is a Grand Idea. Where shall we build it?'

(THAPC, 7)

What greater example of charitable giving could there be than this? Not content to give Eeyore a cup of soup, a warm blanket, or even a holiday in the sun, Pooh decided that he would give his friend a house. Whilst we do not know Pooh's net disposable income, this surely exceeds the 2.5% usually recommended for *zakat*. In his charitable giving to the poor, Winnie-the-Pooh was not merely a *good* Muslim, he was an *exceptional* Muslim.

3.4 The Fourth Pillar: *Sawm* (Fasting)

So far, then, we have discovered good evidence that Winnie-the-Pooh witnessed to God, engaged in regular prayer during which he bowed and prostrated, and gave generously to the poor. There is also a very good example of his engaging in the Islamic practice of fasting. Not content with merely fasting for the hours of daylight and then eating a hearty meal at sundown, Pooh set himself to fast continuously for a whole week. He found this deeply stressful and was helped throughout by having a 'Sustaining Book' (clearly the Qur'an) read to him:

'A week!' said Pooh gloomily. 'What about meals?'

'I'm afraid no meals,' said Christopher Robin, 'because of getting thin quicker. But we *will* read to you.'

Bear began to sigh, and then found he couldn't because he was so tightly stuck; and a tear rolled down his eye, as he said:

'Then would you read a Sustaining Book, such as would help and comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Tightness.'

So for a week Christopher Robin read that sort of book at the North end of Pooh, and Rabbit hung his washing on the South end.'

(WTP, 27-28)

Notice, too, the recurrent theme of Pooh's charity here. Not content with merely fasting and listening to the recital of the Qur'an, he simultaneously served his friend Rabbit in an attitude of quiet humility. What better example of Islamic piety is there than this?

3.5 The Fifth Pillar: *Hajj* (Pilgrimage)

The last of the five pillars of Islam that a good Muslim is expected to practice is that of pilgrimage or *hajj*. If Christopher Robin's house in the East represents the Ka'aba, then we do have several examples of Winnie-the-Pooh making a pilgrimage there; WTP, 7, 127. On the latter occasion, Pooh made the pilgrimage by means of a very dangerous boat journey:

'All boats have to have a name,' he said, 'so I shall call mine *The Floating Bear*.' And with these words he dropped his boat into the water and jumped in after it. For a little while Pooh and *The Floating Bear* were uncertain as to which of them was meant to be on the top, but after having tried one or two different positions, they settled down with *The Floating Bear* underneath and Pooh triumphant astride it, paddling vigorously with his feet.
(WTP, 125)

Pooh also undertook other sacred pilgrimages, for example his now famous journey to find the 'North Pole':

'And that's that,' said Pooh. 'What do we do next?'
'We are all going on an Expedition,' said Christopher Robin, as he got up and brushed himself. 'Thank you, Pooh.'
'Going on an Expedition?' said Pooh eagerly. 'I don't think I've ever been on one of those. Where are we going to on this Expedition?'
'Expedition, silly old Bear. It's got an 'x' in it.'
'Oh!' said Pooh. 'I know.' But he didn't really.
'We're going to discover the North Pole.'
(WTP, 101)

There is some disagreement amongst classical exegetes of Pooh as to whether the 'North Pole' is also Mecca or whether it represents some other important spiritual location such as the Dome of the Rock. However, this writer believes that the contextual evidence will show that it is, in fact, Mecca, and so this chapter represents another of Pooh's pilgrimages. Let us consider the evidence in favour of this hypothesis:

- Pooh did not make the journey alone, but with many of his companions (WTP, 102-106). This suggests the occasion was that of the annual *hajj*.
- When he and his Companions neared the end of their pilgrimage, they came to a spring. This was clearly the sacred *Zam Zam* well at Mecca (WTP, 107)

It is also noteworthy that Pooh and his Companions were aware of some of the important Islamic practices that accompany the *hajj*, most notably that of circumambulation. This is a major part of the pilgrimage rites and that we see Pooh circumambulating is another important piece of evidence that he was a good Muslim:

On a fine winter's day when Piglet was brushing away the snow in front of his house, he happened to look up, and there was Winnie-the-Pooh. Pooh was walking round and round in a circle, thinking of something else, and when Piglet called to him, he just went on walking.
(WTP, 31)

Not only do we have evidence of multiple occasions of Pooh going on pilgrimage, we also have it recorded that he carefully followed the ascribed practices of *hajj*. Clearly he well earned his full name, *Winnie-the-Pooh al-Hajji*.

4. Other Islamic Practices

All the evidence so far points to the conclusion that Winnie-the-Pooh was indeed a good Muslim. He took a Muslim name, he bore witness to Allah, he prayed regularly, he fasted and gave generously to the poor, and he completed the *hajj* more than once. But the evidence is stronger still, showing that Pooh engaged in a number of other important Islamic practices including ritual cleansing (*wudu*), the eating of clean foods, and the following (and carrying out) of Islamic law (*shari'a*).

4.1 Ritual Cleansing (*wudu*)

Islamic law instructs that a good Muslim needs to ensure that they are ritually clean before prayer. This is usually achieved by means of washing with water, although sand can be used if there is no water. Given the amount of rain in the One Hundred Wood, there was never any shortage of water and we find plenty examples of Pooh engaging in *wudu* before he prayed. Here are just a few brief examples:

Pooh had now splashed across the stream ...
(WTP, 79)

Winnie-the-Pooh stopped again, and licked the top of his nose in a cooling manner
...
(WTP, 35)

Pooh was also well aware that when cleansing oneself after going to the toilet, one should not use the right hand but the left. Being a bear of very little brain, he had to concentrate hard to get this correct:

Pooh looked at his two paws. He knew that one of them was right, and he knew that when you had decided which one of them was the right, then the other one was the left, but he could never remember how to begin.
(THAPC, 113)

It is also clear that Pooh's practice of ritual cleanliness was observed by his Companions and that they sought to copy it:

Before he knew it, Piglet was in the bath, and Kanga was scrubbing him firmly with a large leathery flannel.
'Ow!' cried Piglet 'Let me out! I'm Piglet!'
'Don't open the mouth, dear, or the soap goes in,' said Kanga. 'There! What did I tell you?'
(WTP, 95)

As a good Muslim, Winnie-the-Pooh was concerned to remain in a state of *wudu* for as long as possible and also to explain the importance of this to his Companions.

4.2 Clean Foods

Another important Islamic practice is the eating of clean food and the avoidance of unclean food. In this area, Pooh's practice was exemplary.¹³ This is because his chief food was honey:

'Isn't it funny
How a bear likes honey?
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!
I wonder why he does?'
(WTP, 5)

As soon as he got home, he went to the larder; and he stood on a chair, and took down a very large jar of honey from the top shelf. It had HUNNY written on it, but, just to make sure, he took off the paper cover and looked at it, and it *looked* just like honey. 'But you never can tell,' said Pooh. 'I remember my uncle saying once that he had seen cheese just this colour.' So he put his tongue in, and took a large lick. 'Yes,' he said, 'it is. No doubt about that. And honey, I should say, right down to the bottom of the jar. Unless, of course,' he said, 'somebody put cheese in at the bottom just for a joke. Perhaps I had better go a *little* further ... just in case ...'
(WTP, 55-56)

Honey is a clean food with a long and noble history among Muslims. The Qur'an offers the bee as an example of industry and speaks of honey as a wonderful food (Q. 16:68-69). Furthermore, honey will be among the foods of Paradise (Q. 47:15). Whilst in the earlier Scriptures, we read that the Prophet John ate honey (Matt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6). That Winnie-the-Pooh set his mind to eating not only *clean food* but *food praised by the Qur'an* shows the depths of his religious piety.

¹³ Some might object that Pooh took Piglet as a friend. However, a response is that nowhere does the Shari'a or the Qur'an prohibit taking a pig as your best friend. On the other hand, had Pooh tried to *eat* Piglet, that would have been *haram*.

4.3 Reprimanding Sinners

A good Muslim will, of course, not merely keep his religion to himself but will seek to challenge and correct sin among his fellow believers, as well as engaging in *da'wa* among unbelievers. A good example of the first category can be found when Pooh realised there was nothing for it but to apply one of the chief penalties of Islamic Law to Eeyore the donkey:

But Pooh had got the biggest stone he could carry and was leaning over the bridge, holding it in his paws.

'I'm not throwing it, I'm dropping it, Eeyore,' he explained. 'And then I can't miss — I mean I can't hit you. *Could* you stop turning around for a moment because it muddles me rather.'

'No,' said Eeyore, 'I *like* turning round.'

Rabbit began to feel it was time that he took command.

'Now, Pooh,' he said, 'when I say 'Now!' you can drop it. Eeyore, when I say 'Now!' Pooh will drop his stone.'

'Thank you very much, Rabbit, but I expect I shall know.'

'Are you ready, Pooh? Piglet, give Pooh a little more room. Get back there, Roo. Are you ready?'

'No,' said Eeyore.

'Now!' said Rabbit.

Pooh dropped his stone. There was a loud splash, and Eeyore disappeared.

(THAPC, 94-95)

Stoning is one of the severest penalties in *Shar'ia* and it is worth asking what it was that caused Pooh to believe that it was his Islamic duty to stone Eeyore. Was Pooh a *jihadi* attacking the infidel? Unlikely, since elsewhere Eeyore himself also seems to be a Muslim.¹⁴ Thus Pooh must have believed that Eeyore was guilty of a heinous sin and that the only recourse was to stone his fellow Muslim. A close reading of the text suggests two possibilities:

- The first possibility was that Eeyore had rejected the need for ritual washing:

'Very,' said Eeyore. 'When I want to be washed, Pooh, I'll let you know.'
(THAPC 94)

Simply refusing ritual washing is not a heinous sin in itself. But if Eeyore was actually denying that any Muslim *needed* to engage in *wudu*, this could be a capital offence according to some classical Islamic authorities.¹⁵

- The second possibility was that Eeyore is homosexual and would thus fall under a capital sentence according to all the four schools of Islamic Law. The evidence

¹⁴ He too prostrates, goes on pilgrimage, ritually washes, circumambulates etc.

¹⁵ Fiqh-us-Sunnah 3:7 says that if a Muslim denies the obligation of *zakat*, he is outside Islam and can be legally killed. A legal argument-by-extension could apply this equally to *wudu*.

for this is that Eeyore was rather too fond of flowers and all his friends were aware of this:

So [Piglet] hurried out, saying to himself, 'Eeyore, Violets,' and then 'Violets, Eeyore,' in case he forgot, because it was that sort of day, and he picked a large bunch and trotted along, smelling them, and feeling very happy, until he came to the place where Eeyore was.'
(THAPC, 82)

This might also explain why Eeyore usually hid himself away in a damp corner on the edge of the forest (THAPC, 153); in other words, to avoid his sinful practices being detected by the others. When Winnie-the-Pooh discovered the extent of the sin, he dutifully applied Islamic Law and stoned Eeyore. What greater sign could there be of a bear's devotion to Islam than the willingness to lay down his friend's life for his beliefs.

5. The Six Major Beliefs of Islam

So far we have seen how Winnie-the-Pooh followed the five pillars of Islam, ritually washed, ate clean foods, and reprimanded sinners. He was, by any definition of the term, a good Muslim. But another key test of a person's Islamic orthodoxy is whether he subscribes to the six major beliefs of Islam. We refer, of course, to belief in God, angels, Scripture, Prophets, the Last Day, and predestination. Can we find evidence that Pooh believed in these? It is my contention that we can find direct evidence of two.

5.1 Belief in God

We have already demonstrated that Allah is represented by the figure of Christopher Robin in the works transmitted down to us about Winnie-the-Pooh. Once this is understood, one sees that the books are deeply theocentric and that Pooh's entire life revolved around his devotion to God. We have already seen how he prayed, fasted, and told others about his beliefs. So deep was his faith that his entire life could be described as a walk with God (cf. THAPC, 174). Whenever he was in trouble or difficulty, Pooh sought the will of Allah (THAPC, 65). He also sought Allah's provision for his daily food (cf. WTP, 8ff). And it is clear that Allah rewarded him for his faith (WTP, 133).¹⁶

5.2 Belief in the Prophets

As well as a firm belief in God, Winnie-the-Pooh also believed in the prophets, those whom Allah had chosen to transmit his message to others. This becomes clear when one asks the question 'who were the prophets to Pooh's generation?' The clue is actually in the Qur'an

¹⁶ One might compare this chapter with the story of the table in Surah 5; both contain the motif of a table spread with food provided by divine grace.

(Q. 7:157) which speaks of Muhammad as an *unlettered prophet*; this surely implies that the other prophets had been lettered men. And thus it becomes clear: the greatest prophet in Pooh's day was Owl, whose reputation as a person of letters was unequalled in the One Hundred Acre Wood. If we can show that Pooh respected the wisdom of Owl (PBUH), then this demonstrates that Pooh believed in and followed the prophets.

Winnie-the-Pooh read the two notices very carefully, first from left to right, and afterwards, in case he had missed some of it, from right to left. Then, to make quite sure, he knocked and pulled the knocker, and he pulled and knocked the bell-rope, and he called out in a very loud clear voice, 'Owl! I require an answer! It's Bear speaking!'
(WTP, 43)

Thus we can clearly see that when Pooh was in need of religious guidance, he went to the Prophet Owl (PBUH). Owl's wisdom and knowledge was far above his and Pooh had to concentrate hard to follow the Prophet's erudition:

[Pooh] gave a deep sigh, and tried very hard to listen to what Owl was saying. But Owl went on and on, using longer and longer words, until at last he came back to where he started, and he explained that the person to write out this notice was Christopher Robin.
(WTP, 46)

Notice the emphasis on Owl's (PBUH) status as a highly literate Prophet, one whose vocabulary was to be marvelled at. It is also of course profound that he directed Pooh's enquiry to a higher authority, that of Allah himself. It is also significant to notice *when* Pooh was in the habit of visiting the Prophet:

'Hallo, Owl,' said Pooh. 'I hope we're not too late for — I mean, how are you, Owl? Piglet and I just came to see you because it's Thursday.'
(THAPC, 128)

As a pious Muslim, Pooh would of course be spending Friday at the mosque, praying and studying. But before he attended the mosque he wanted to learn from the Prophet of Allah, and so paid a visit to Owl (PBUH) on the Thursday.

6. Deeper Significances

The evidence that we have laid out in this paper would seem to be fairly conclusive. Winnie-the-Pooh lived his life as a Muslim, held to major Islamic beliefs and centred his entire life around his faith. He was, truly, a good Muslim. However, it is our firm conviction that we can go further than this. Studying the evidence carefully leads one to the conclusion that Pooh was no ordinary Muslim.

6.1 Winnie-the-Pooh, Teacher of Islam

Pooh was not merely content to practice Islam, he also sought to propagate Islam. There is clear and incontrovertible evidence that he taught his Companions Islamic practices and that such was the regard in which they held him, they followed his lead. We may begin by noting how his Companions listened to his teaching:

But they were all quite happy when Pooh and Piglet came along, and they stopped working in order to have a little rest and listen to Pooh's new song. So then they all told Pooh good it was ...
(THAPC, 151)

The willingness of his Companions to accept and listen to his teaching explains why we can find many examples of them also engaging in Islamic practices. For example, consider circumambulation, an important part of the *hajj* ritual:

Eeyore walked all round Tigger one way, and then turned and walked all round him the other way.
'What did you say it was?' he asked.
(THAPC, 24)

'And thistles,' said Tigger, who was now running round in circles with his tongue hanging out.
(THAPC, 28)

Eeyore was a particularly keen practitioner of circumambulation, perhaps as an attempt to earn forgiveness for his other sinful practices.¹⁷

Looking very calm, very dignified, with his legs in the air, came Eeyore from under the bridge.
'It's Eeyore!' cried Roo, terribly excited.
'Is that so?' said Eeyore, getting caught up by a little eddy, and turning slowly round three times. 'I wondered.'
'I didn't know you were playing.'
'I'm not,' said Eeyore.
'Eeyore, what *are* you doing there?' said Rabbit.
'I'll give you three guesses, Rabbit. Digging holes in the ground? Wrong. Leaping from branch to branch of a young oak-tree? Wrong. Waiting for somebody to help me out of the river? Right. Give Rabbit time, and he'll always get the answer.'
'But Eeyore,' said Pooh in distress, 'what can we — I mean, how shall we — do you think if we —'
'Yes,' said Eeyore. 'One of those would be just the thing. Thank you, Pooh.'
'He's going *round* and *round*,' said Roo, much impressed.
(THAPC, 92-93)

¹⁷ See above, p13.

This example is also interesting because we see Eeyore prostrating. Admittedly he had not fully grasped the practice correctly but the intent was there. Indeed, when Roo said ‘are you *playing*’, Eeyore replied ‘no’ — clearly he was *praying* not *playing*. From where had Eeyore learnt these Islamic practices? Surely from the one person whose life modelled them so supremely, Winnie-the-Pooh, teacher of Islam. Not only his words but also his example had rubbed off on many of his Companions:

‘Well, I’ve got an idea,’ said Rabbit, ‘and here it is. We take Tigger for a long explore, somewhere he’s never been, and we lose him there, and next morning we find him again, and — mark my words — he’ll be a different Tigger altogether.’

‘Why?’ said Pooh.

‘Because he’ll be a Humble Tigger. Because he’ll be a Sad Tigger, a Melancholy Tigger, a Small and Sorry Tigger, an Oh-Rabbit-I-am-glad-to-see-you-Tigger. That’s why.’

(THAPC, 107)

The example set by Winnie-the-Pooh of humility and humble submission had inspired his Companions to the extent that they wished to teach Islam themselves. Rabbit saw the deep spiritual need in Tigger¹⁸ and took it upon himself to teach him the importance of humble submission to Allah.

These examples are enough to show that Pooh was not merely a *good* Muslim, he was also a *teacher* of Islam, in other words he was an *imam*.

6.2 Winnie-the-Pooh, Prophet of Islam

The Qur’an is clear that a messenger has been sent to every community (Q. 10:47; 14:4; 16:36) and thus it is of course properly Islamic to acknowledge that this must have included the community of the One Hundred Acre Wood. We have already discussed the fact that Owl (PBUH) was a prophet, but it must be noted that (a) some prophets were contemporary with each other and (b) the Qur’an distinguishes between ordinary prophets (*nabi*) and messengers (*rasul*). It is our contention that such was the example, teaching, impact and piety of Winnie-the-Pooh that he was more than just a good Muslim. Indeed, he was more than an *imam*. He was nothing less than *Pooh rasulallah* — in other words, Winnie-the-Pooh, Messenger of Allah. There are three major lines of evidence apart from what has been studied already.

6.2.1 A Warner

Part of the role of any messenger is to be a Warner to his people (Q. 35:24). Pooh fits this role perfectly and many examples could be adduced. Here are two of the clearest:

‘The tracks!’ said Pooh. ‘A *third animal has joined the other two!*’

¹⁸ Tigger’s bounces clearly represent a creaturely attempt to get near to God; cf. Gen. 11:1-9.

‘Pooh!’ said Piglet. ‘Do you think it is another Woozle?’
‘No,’ said Pooh, ‘because it makes different marks. It is either Two Woozles and one, as it might be, Wizzle, or Two, as it might be, Wizzles and one, if so it is, Woozle. Let us continue to follow them.’
So they went on, feeling just a little anxious now, in case the three animals in front of them were of Hostile Intent.’
(WTP, 34-35)

Here we see Pooh acting as a Warner of the potentially imminent divine judgement in the shape of one or more Woozles or Wizzles.¹⁹ Were it not for his divinely appointed role here, Piglet might well have been unprepared for what would follow. A further example of Pooh’s role as a Warner can be seen below:

‘Yes,’ said Piglet. ‘Pooh,’ he went on nervously, and came a little closer, ‘do you think we’re in a trap?’
Pooh hadn’t thought about it at all, but now he nodded. For suddenly he remembered how he and Piglet had once made a Pooh Trap for Heffalumps, and he guessed what had happened. He and Piglet had fallen into a Heffalump Trap for Poohs! That was what it was.
(THAPC, 41-42)

Once again we see Pooh warning Piglet of the divine judgement to come. Piglet’s spiritual eyes were already open (he had seen the ‘trap’ he was in, clearly the trap of sin dug by the whispering of Satan) and he was ripe for warning. Pooh’s wise words caused Piglet to reassess his life and seek God. That Piglet did so is demonstrated just a few minutes later:

‘Pooh!’ cried Piglet, and now it was *his* turn to be the admiring one. ‘You’ve saved us!’
(THAPC, 43)

By warning Piglet of impending divine judgement, his friend was able to turn to Islam and thus cry ‘we are saved!’ Only a true Warner, a true Messenger of Allah, could have such a clear and immediate impact upon the people to whom he was sent.

6.2.2 Rebuilder of the Sacred House

All Muslims have a connection with the ‘Sacred House’, the Ka’aba in Mecca, but some messengers have a closer connection. According to Islamic tradition, it was Adam who first built the Sacred House when Allah commanded him to. Then, later, Abraham and Ishmael rebuilt it. Finally, Muhammad himself cleansed it of idols. This special connection with the Sacred House can also be traced in the life of Pooh, who it seems also rebuilt the Sacred House when it had fallen into disrepair:

¹⁹ Both creatures may have some connection with the Arabic *wazza* (to incite, to set against); in exercising his divine judgement, Allah *sets himself against* the unbeliever.

‘We will build it here,’ said Pooh, ‘just by this wood, out of the wind, because this is where I thought of it.’
(THAPC, 7)

Just as Abraham had the help of Ishmael, Pooh had a companion in the shape of Piglet to help him with his divinely-appointed task:

‘There was a heap of sticks on the other side of the wood,’ said Piglet. ‘I saw them. Lots and lots. All piled up.’
‘Thank you, Piglet,’ said Pooh. ‘What you have just said will be a Great Help to us.’
(THAPC, 7)

When their task was almost complete, Allah (who is represented in the traditions by the figure of Christopher Robin) was delighted with their work:

They both listened ... and they heard a deep gruff voice saying in a singing voice that the more it snowed the more it went on snowing, and a small high voice tiddely-pomming in between.
‘It’s Pooh,’ said Christopher Robin excitedly ...
‘Possibly,’ said Eeyore.
‘And Piglet,’ said Christopher Robin excitedly.
‘Probably,’ said Eeyore. ‘What we *want* is a Trained Bloodhound.’
The words of the song finished suddenly.
‘We’ve *finished our HOUSE!*’ sang the gruff voice.
‘*Tiddely pom!*’ sang the squeaky one.
‘*It’s a beautiful HOUSE ...*’
‘*Tiddely pom ...*’
(THAPC, 12)

As the story unfolds, we discover that Pooh and Piglet did not simply build the House from scratch, rather they *rebuilt* it. This stands Pooh, Prophet of Islam, in a long and noble tradition that runs from Muhammad, through Abraham and Ishmael, back to the first man, Adam. That the Islamic tradition has not celebrated Pooh alongside them is an oversight that now deserves to be corrected.

6.2.3 Speaker of Prophetic Utterances

All Muslims will affirm that the Qur’an is the very speech of God, a copy of the eternal tablets in heaven.²⁰ Whilst there is of course nothing quite like its 114 suras, it is surely no coincidence that Winnie-the-Pooh delivered the wisdom with which Allah entrusted him in poetic rhyming couplets. None of his Companions could answer his poem-like-it challenge and Pooh’s divinely-given oracles tower over the utterances of the other characters who lived in the One Hundred Acre Wood. Just a few examples will suffice:

²⁰ Apart from heretics like the Mu‘tazilites. But they run the risk of divine judgement in the shape of Heffalumps, Woozles and Wizzles.

'The more it snows
(Tiddely pom),
The more it goes,
(Tiddely pom)
On snowing'
(THAPC, 2)

The simplicity of the construction is profound. Some scholars have also drawn attention to the clear Semitic parallelisms in Pooh's poetry and suggested that he may actually have been of Arab descent.

'Who found the Tail?
'I' said Pooh,
'At a quarter to two
(Only it was a quarter to eleven really)
I found the Tail.'
(WTP, 50)

If 'tail' should actually read 'tale',²¹ then here Pooh testified to the tales of the previous prophets which Allah had revealed to him. He would have had no way of knowing them other than by revelation and thus his poem here evokes echoes of the Qur'an (Q. 3:44).²²

Just like the Qur'an, however, some of Pooh's revelation was clear and certain (*muḥkamāt*) and some was unclear (*mutashābihāt*).²³ The latter category is well-illustrated by the following:

'Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,
A fly can't bird, but a bird can fly.
Ask me a riddle and I reply:
Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie.

Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,
A fish can't whistle and neither can I.
Ask me a riddle and I reply:
Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie.

Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,
Why does a chicken? I don't know why.
Ask me a riddle and I reply:
Cottleston Cottleston Cottleston Pie.
(WTP, 67-68)

²¹ Just as the Qur'an was revealed in many readings, which depend upon the vowel pointing and diacritics applied, the same may also be true of *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*.

²² These poems would often just appear in his head, a sure sign of revelation (cf. THAPC, 88).

²³ cf. Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2000) 79.

The classical commentators disagreed as to the exact meaning of this deeply profound surah. As with the Qur'an, it is safer to follow a principle of interpreting Winnie-the-Pooh by Winnie-the-Pooh and to focus, where possible, on the clear verses.

In short, it seems clear that Winnie-the-Pooh was more than just a good Muslim, he was also a Warner, a Rebuilder of the Sacred House and a Messenger. His name can stand proudly in the list of Islamic prophets. If some wish to protest that Winnie the Pooh was a bear, we reply, what is wrong with a *bear* among the prophets? After all, Muslims already believe that Muhammad was the *seal*.

7. Conclusion

And so we come to the end of our study and we think one runs no risk of overstatement if one says that the evidence is *overwhelming*. There can be no doubt, if one applies the criteria that we have done, that Winnie-the-Pooh was a Very Good Muslim Indeed. He prayed, he fasted, he went on pilgrimage and he submitted to Allah. His humble example inspired his Companions to seek him out and when they did, he taught them Islam.

But Winnie-the-Pooh was more than an ordinary Muslim, he was also an Islamic Prophet. He brought revelation in short, poetic surahs. He warned his Companions of the coming judgement. He rebuilt the Sacred House. In short, he was none other than *Winnie-the-Pooh, Prophet of Islam* (PBUH²⁴).

8. Postscript: Of Heffalumps and Hermeneutics

The astute reader will, I am sure, have already begun to suspect that a strong thread of satire runs throughout this paper. Nobody could seriously believe that Winnie-the-Pooh was a Muslim ... *could* they? And indeed the argument outlined in this paper is satirical. The hermeneutic that we have applied to *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* is flawed for two major reasons.

Firstly, it is highly selective. In order to show that Winnie-the-Pooh was a Muslim, we have quoted only those parts of the texts that serve our cause and have ignored those parts which are either of no use or, worse, are counter-productive. Sentences have usually been quoted with no regard as to their surrounding context.

Secondly, at its heart, our hermeneutic is entirely circular. We have assumed that Winnie-the-Pooh was a Muslim and then read that assumption back into the text. Instead of reading the text within its own interpretative framework, we have imposed one from outside. This is not exegesis but eisegesis. Of course every reader brings assumptions with them to any

²⁴ 'PBUH' being, in this context, an acronym for Pooh Bear, Ursine Hero.

text,²⁵ but when one's assumptions entirely drive one's reading and do not allow the text to speak for itself, then any conclusions derived will be seriously skewed.

Thus the hermeneutic is flawed. But the point is that the method of reading we have applied and its inherent flaws *are exactly the same* as those applied to the Gospels by Muslims who wish to claim that 'Jesus was a Muslim'. In short, if Jesus was a Muslim then, equally and by exactly the same methods, so was Winnie-the-Pooh. This popular Muslim apologetic contains exactly the same weaknesses as our interpretation of Pooh in this paper. If you want Jesus as a Muslim or a Prophet of Islam, then you also need to have Pooh.

8.1 Heffalumps Everywhere: The Dangers of Selective Interpretation

Attempts to show that Jesus was a Muslim involve a reading of the Gospels as selective as our reading of Winnie-the-Pooh. Verses that would prove otherwise are entirely ignored and those verses that are quoted are simply ripped from their context with no regard for the material that surrounds them. For example:

- Some Muslim writers have pointed out that Jesus prostrated when he prayed. But we are not told that this was only on specific occasions and that we have examples of him adopting other bodily postures in prayer (e.g. Lk 9:16). We certainly are not told of the prayer that he taught his followers to pray (Mt 6:9-13), nor that he commanded them to pray *in his name* (Jn 14:13; cf. Mt 18:18-20).
- These Muslims writers often note that Jesus gave instructions about fasting. But they mysteriously neglect to tell us that he specifically commanded his followers not to fast whilst he was with them — the kingdom of God was so present in his ministry that fasting was not necessary (Mk 2:18-20). Nor are we told that first-century Jews usually fasted for a particular reason: they believed that they were still living in exile whilst the Romans were in charge and they longed for God to move in power to inaugurate his kingdom and rescue his people.²⁶ In other words, fasting was not simply an annual cultic practice (unlike the Muslim festival Ramadan) but something done to implore God to move and to vindicate.²⁷ It was specifically linked to the context of Israel in 'exile', living under pagan oppression. Once God moved in power to vindicate his people, fasts would become feasts (Zech 8:19).
- Muslims writers certainly do not inform their readers that Jesus said that all of the prophets were forerunners of him (Mk 12:1-11) and that John was the last of the prophets (Lk 16:16; cf. Lk 3:16). Nor are we told how he believed the kingdom of God was uniquely breaking into history in his ministry (e.g. Lk 4:16-21; 11:20).

²⁵ The postmodern literary critic Stanley Fish has offered a particular sophisticated version of this method of allowing one's assumptions to entirely dominate the text. His hermeneutic is succinctly critiqued in Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1991) 377-380.

²⁶ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) 234-235.

²⁷ Its other major purpose was as a sign of repentance. The prophet Isaiah told of God's anger when fasting becomes just a dull routine and the heart of the person is not right (Isa 58:3-9).

Muslim writers are also silent on the fact that Jesus believed he had replaced the Temple in his ability to forgive sins (Mt 9:1-6),²⁸ that he believed himself to enjoy a uniquely close relationship with God (e.g. Mt 11:27; Jn 14:9), nor are we told that he believed a fundamental part of his vocation was to die (e.g. Mt 26:6-13, 26-29; Mk 8:31; 10:38-40; Lk 20:15). In short, anything non-Islamic is ignored.

One is reminded of Winnie-the-Pooh and the heffalump, a beast of which Pooh and his friends were terrified. Whilst they had never seen one of these almost legendary creatures, Pooh and Piglet insisted on reading the flimsiest bits of evidence as proof of its existence: the sight of a bear with a honey jar on his head, a large pit in the ground, the sound of a voice.²⁹ Contrary evidence is ignored (for instance, the lack of footprints), the things Pooh and Piglet do see are read out of context, and so heffalumps are seen everywhere. This is no different from those Muslims who insist on seeing Jesus as a Muslim. Perhaps they should take up heffalump hunting instead. Their hermeneutics would be as equally suited.

8.2 Chasing Woozles: Reading in Circles

A fundamental problem is that Muslims who wish to claim that Jesus was a Muslim are engaged in one big circular argument. They begin by assuming what they want to prove (that he was) and then read this view back into the Gospels. They then claim to be able to find evidence for their position. This is hardly surprising, since they assumed it in the first place.³⁰

This kind of circular reasoning is somewhat reminiscent of Winnie-the-Pooh's hunt for Woozles. Walking around a spinney of trees in the snow one day, Pooh came across a set of footprints. These were obviously the tracks of a Woozle! So Pooh followed them around the spinney once more. Soon the first set of prints were joined by a second. At this point he met Piglet. Pooh explained that he was possibly tracking not one but two Woozles. So Piglet and Pooh set off round the spinney once again. Soon they discovered yet another set of paw prints — could this be *three* Woozles? Or two Woozles and a Wizzle? It takes Christopher Robin, sitting in the branches above, to point out to Pooh that he has been following his own prints round and round the spinney.³¹ This kind of walking around in circles reminds us of certain people's hermeneutics ...

²⁸ For a first-century Jew, the Temple was the place where one could go to make a sacrifice and receive forgiveness of sins. When Jesus forgave sins outside of this system, he was bypassing the whole of the Temple cult and saying that forgiveness of sins was now to be found through him. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) 268-274, 647.

²⁹ WTP, 62; THAPC, 41-42, 47.

³⁰ The same technique has also been used by some to claim that the Qur'an actually teaches that Jesus died on the cross and that it affirms a more or less identical Christology to that of orthodox Christianity; see the discussion in Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Mission Research, 1977) 27-29. Muslims who wish to use the same method to find Jesus in the Qur'an have some strange hermeneutical bedfellows.

³¹ WTP, 30-38.

‘Jesus was a Muslim,’ says a Muslim writer who, for the sake of convenience, we shall call Ibn McElawayn. So off we go, around the spinney for the first time.

Soon we discover a set of footprints in the snow. ‘Aha!’ says Ibn McElawayn. ‘Look! Jesus once prostrated when he prayed. This is clearly a Very Interested Sign Indeed. It shows he must have been a Muslim.’ Once more around the spinney we go.

‘As he was a Muslim,’ said Ibn McElawayn, wiping honey from his lips and studying a second set of footprints in the snow, ‘he must have spoken about going on *hajj*. I wonder if I can find any references? Hmm ... nothing. But wait! Look, here Jesus talks about people giving excuses. These must be excuses about not going on *hajj*. That must be the case because Jesus was a Muslim.’ And so off around the spinney we go around for a third time.

Woozles, Woozles everywhere and not a drop of sense. Meanwhile, Christopher Robin, sitting in the branches high above hung his head in his hands and wondered if Owl might be persuaded to teach certain other animals how to spell ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘eisigesis’.

8.3 Summary

Only by such circular arguing, quoting out of context, or ignoring whole contrary passages, can it be even remotely suggested that Jesus was a Muslim. And if this is claimed, *then by exactly the same reasoning, so was Winnie-the-Pooh*. And any hermeneutic that can produce that result is clearly wholly and utterly flawed.

So what is the answer to all of this? The answer is for Muslims to learn to understand Jesus in his own context, namely that of first-century Judaism. There are plenty of good resources and contemporary scholarship available. One can start with reading the Gospels on their own terms. Then one might consider progressing to any number of good New Testament scholars, all of whom are currently at the cutting edge of their fields — for example, one could suggest Wright,³² Witherington,³³ Hurtado³⁴, and Bauckham³⁵ for starters.

³² N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000) is a good introduction to the field. Then one might progress to his three volumes *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003).

³³ Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest* (Leicester: IVP, 1997) is a good, up to date survey of scholarship on the historical Jesus. Whilst his *Jesus the Sage* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) should be required reading for any Muslim before he or she even thinks about making any claims that the Bible does not include Jesus in the unique identity of God.

³⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) is a careful study showing how the earliest Jewish Christians onwards worshipped Jesus. Hurtado traces this practice backwards and asks what it was that caused this in the first place.

³⁵ Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998.

What, then, shall we say about those Muslim writers who insist on peddling books with titles or theses like 'Jesus was a Muslim'. At the end of the day, one has to wonder whether their main motivation is to make money from the well-meaning, if gullible, Muslims who buy them. For these authors, Eeyore's description of Pooh springs to mind:

A Bear with a Pleasing Manner but a Positively Startling Lack of Brain.³⁶

Winnie-the-Pooh was not a Muslim. Jesus was not a Muslim. Only the very naive, very foolish, or very manipulative would seriously claim either.

³⁶ THAPC, 159.

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