

The Deity of Jesus in the Synoptics

I am involved with quite a bit of debate with Muslims in the Bradford area which I really enjoy. One accusation that is frequently asserted is that Jesus did not claim to be God. Now the most explicit answer would be to redirect the reader to John 8:58 "Before Abraham was born I am." The "I am" identical to the name given by God when he revealed himself to Moses (Ex 3:14). However, I find this a slightly uneasy answer as John's gospel is very different from Matthew, Mark and Luke – known as the synoptics. It is generally accepted that John contains theological reflections – some things that Jesus may not have said but are a theological explanation of what he said and did. This then raises the question of whether John interpreted Jesus correctly.

In response to this I looked at the term Son of God in the synoptics. This comes up again and again in the synoptics. Below is a sample from the :

1. In Mark 1:1 (the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.)
2. The Angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35)
3. When Jesus is about 12 he speaks of the Temple as his Father's house (Luke 2:49)
4. At Jesus' baptism God calls him his Son (Mat 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22)
5. The Devil tempts him to try to prove he is the Son of God, Jesus does not deny it. (Mat 4:3; Lk 4:3)
6. The demons called him the Son of God (Mat 8:28; Mk 3:11; Lk 4:41)
7. His disciples called him the Son of God (after he calmed the storm (Mt 14:33) and at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:16))
8. He acknowledged he was the Son of God at his trial (Mt 26:64; Mk 14:61)
9. On the cross some bystanders act as if he had claimed to be the Son of God (Mt 27:40)
10. The centurion says that he is the Son of God (Mt 27:54; Mk 15:39)

Does this prove that Jesus is the Son of God? Well it may do. However, the term Son of God is used in the Old Testament to refer to God's appointed king (Ps 2:7). Are the gospel writers simply saying that Jesus is The King of the Jews? In some cases this may be acceptable, though I think it would be a bit cheeky to write off all of these instances with that explanation, especially at Jesus' trial. Claiming to be a king would not be heresy; claiming to be divine and equal with God would be heresy.

In an interesting article Daniel Doriani [JETS 37/3 (September 1994) 333 – 350] mentions 12 implicit acts that Jesus did in the synoptics that prove that he was the Son of God.

1. He claimed the right to judge mankind (Mt 7:22-23)
2. He claimed the right to forgive sins (Luke 5:17-26)

3. He claimed the right to grant eternal life (Mark 10:17-21; Matt 19:16-21; Luke 18:18-22)
4. He declared that his presence was God's presence as well as the presence of God's kingdom (Matt 12:6; 18:20; 28:18)
5. He declared that the attitude people took toward him would determine their eternal destiny (Matt 7:21-27; 10:32-33)
6. He identified his actions with God's actions (Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37).
7. He taught the truth on his own authority (Matt 5:18;
8. 6:2; 18:3; Luke 13:35)
9. He performed miracles on his own authority (Matt 8:2-3).
10. He appeared to receive worship or obeisance (Mark 5:27, 33;
11. Luke 5:8).
12. He assumed that his life was a pattern for others (e.g. Matt 16:21-26, Luke 8:19-21).
13. He applied to himself Old Testament texts that describe God (Mt 21:15-16)
14. In several parables he indirectly identified himself with a father or king who represents God (Lk 15:3-32).

For a more in-depth analysis of each of these points read the original article which is here:

http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/37/37-3/JETS_37-3_333-350_Doriani.pdf