



UNIL | Université de Lausanne
 Institut romand des sciences bibliques (IRSB)
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Anthropole (ex BFSH 2), salle 5021

« Jew or Judean? The Current Debate about Jesus' Collective Identity »

The ongoing *third quest* for the historical Jesus focused specifically on Jesus' Jewishness. After debating for about a decade his "place" in Judaism of his time (was he a "marginal Jew" or in the "centre" of Jewish religion?) scholars recently challenged even the underlying categorization of Judaism as a *religion*. It is argued that the concept of religion is anachronistic and that careful studies of relevant ancient discourses advise to apply the category of *ethnicity* as more adequate for defining the collective identity of the Jewish people in the Second Temple period. Indeed, a lot of studies of ancient literature - in particular of Josephus' works - prove that Jews and non-Jews alike used the terminology of *ethnos* (people/nation) to refer to Jews, setting them up as an entity parallel to other peoples (*ethne*). Some scholars therefore prefer to translate the Greek term *Ioudaios* with "Judean" instead of "Jew". Not unsurprisingly this shift from religion to ethnicity has its echoes in the current debate about the historical Jesus. They include, for example, the long-lasting scholarly controversy on Jesus' relation to the Law of Moses. But the change from "Jew" to "Judean" has also its ambivalences: Some feel entitled to emphasize anew a discontinuity between Jesus and Judaism; others criticize them just for that reason, because the translation of *Ioudaios* with "Judean" seems to them misleading. Several Jewish scholars complain that this shift will result in an erasure of "Jews" from the English translations of the New Testament and other ancient Jewish literary documents.

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