

What and/or who is an Anti-Mormon?

I see so often that people are "labelled" as anti-Mormon - in order to make sure that we understand the terminology, I would like to provide a couple of definitions:

Mormon

An ancient prophet believed to have compiled a sacred history of the Americas, which were translated and published by Joseph Smith as the Book of Mormon in 1830. A member of the Mormon Church. Also called Latter-day Saint. *Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.*

Mormonism

The doctrine, system, and practices of the Mormons. *Source: Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.*

Anti-

Opposed to; against. *Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.*

So, the term anti-Mormon, from my perspective would mean someone who is opposed to or against the character presented in the Book of Mormon, known as "Mormon" or opposed to people who are members of the Mormons church. I have personally never met anyone who falls into this category, but no doubt they exist, just as people exist who oppose or who are against people just because they are Christian.

Anti-Mormonism, on the other hand, is being opposed to or against the doctrine, systems and practices of Mormonism.

Differences

What therefore are the key difference between anti-Mormons and anti-Mormonism?
These are:

1) An anti-Mormon is a person. It cannot be otherwise. Therefore the person using the term is focusing on the person rather than what they believe. Likewise, a true anti-Mormon would be focusing the person who is a Mormon. Both ways this is a focus on the person rather than doctrines / beliefs. One can oppose Mormons as people and yet not have an opinion on the religion. This was true of some people historically who had disputes with Mormons because of their control and interpersonal dealings rather than their beliefs as they moved from location to location.

2) Anti-Mormonism is a belief. You cannot say that a person is an anti-Mormonism. It does not make sense. Neither is it possible to say that a person who holds to a belief in anti-Mormonism is opposed to the people who are Mormons because Mormonism refers to the doctrines, systems and practices of Mormonism, the belief system itself. Anti-Mormonism therefore is a term which dis-associates itself from the persons involved on either side. One can therefore care deeply about Mormons which holding to a belief in anti-Mormonism.

Anti-Mormonism therefore does not focus on the people who believe in Mormonism, but rather the doctrine, systems and practices.

I do know Christian apologists who are opposed to Mormonism (the doctrine, system and practices of the Mormon church), and as such I could see their views referred to as anti-Mormonism, but that is quite different because it focuses on the belief system not the person.

There is a third term which is not often used by Mormon apologists and that is a Non-Mormon. A person can in fact be a non-Mormon, not be enamoured by Mormon doctrine and yet not have anything against Mormons or Mormonism as such.

Often these terms are mis-used by Mormon apologists by using the term “anti-Mormon” when referring to a person who is opposed to the Mormon theology. By so doing, the Mormon apologist appears to want to try to discredit the person’s position by trying to attack the person himself (i.e. labelling him as anti-Mormon). This is what is referred to in logic and debates as a “ad hominem” argument or as name-calling. An ad hominem simply means to attack the opponent in a debate or in trying to establish a logical argument rather than basing the position on substance or on facts. For example, if someone said “You are wrong because you are ugly”, it would make no sense because the argument is based upon the person’s appearance. Likewise, to say that “You are wrong because you are an anti-Mormon” is equally false because it focuses on an attribute of the person. Even if the attribute were true (and rarely if ever do Mormon apologists who use this approach try to establish the validity of their use of the term), a position is not wrong because of who the person is. Rather, the validity of a position must be established by the facts.

Labelling such as use of the term “anti-Mormon” against opponents of Mormonism is an attempt to distract from the merits of the position which they put forth by attacking the person who holds to that position and thus failing to show appropriate respect for the person.

Therefore, anytime that you read or hear the term anti-Mormon being used in a debate over Mormon theology, read carefully because that is usually a good indication that the argument itself may be too weak to stand on it’s own merits.

Tom Smith
smithtj.geo@yahoo.com
<http://discern.athome.to/>
October 25, 2003