

Sunday, October 22, 2006

Is the Expression 'Invisible Magic Being' "Pejorative"?

Recently Christian apologist [James Anderson](#) visited my blog and, while posting some comments critical of [one of my posts](#), he stated:

I've never understood why you feel the need to pepper your writing with playground pejoratives like "invisible magic beings", which add nothing to your analysis.

James states that he "never understood why" I use this term, so I will take this opportunity to explain it. Others believers may benefit from this as well, as a number of Christians have apparently taken umbrage at the term. So hopefully after reading my reasons here, James and others will finally understand.

In a nutshell, I use the term "invisible magic being" because I think it accurately captures the imaginary personal entity that Christians and other religionists insist exists.

In fact, it seems dubious to me that any religionists would consider my use of this expression "pejorative." After all, look at what they tell me to believe. Christians, for instance, claim that their god exists, and often refer to it as a "being." They claim that their god is "the supreme being," a "divine being," an "infinite being," etc. So I don't know why Christians like James would find my use of this term bothersome.

Also, Christians claim that their god is *invisible* - that is, no one can see it, not even believers themselves. Van Til himself affirms that his god is invisible in [The Reformed Pastor and Ecumenism](#) when he favorably quotes [Col. 1:13-20](#). In fact, the bible itself, upon which Christianity is (for some part anyway) based, tells us that its god is *invisible* in I Tim. 1:17. So again, I don't know why a Christian would be disturbed by the use of this term.

The controversial element of the expression in dispute, then, must, by process of elimination, be the use of the adjective 'magic'. But in my view, this term is wholly warranted. According to [Webster's dictionary](#), [magic](#) is:

"the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces,"

or

"an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source."

Do not Christians believe that their god has "supernatural power over natural forces," that it possesses "an extraordinary power or influence"? Is their god not said to be "a supernatural source"? Indeed, it seems that apologists are ruffled the most when others disbelieve their claims that a supernatural something exists in the first place. So again, it's strange to me that Christians of all persons would resist my use of this term, or be offended by it, for they openly declare that their god is *supernatural*. According to the lexicon which I have consulted, magic is associated with that which is alleged to be supernatural. In particular, magic is said to be "an extraordinary power" which is thought to belong to "a supernatural source." And this "extraordinary power," according to the Christian worldview for instance, spills over into the mundane world in which we live, permeating the believer's experience. According to [John Frame, this is a biblical position](#):

Scripture teaches that believers in Christ know God in a supernatural way, with a certainty that transcends that obtainable by investigation.

It's pretty hard to debate someone who thinks he has magical knowledge!

So if someone asserts a supernatural being, they are in effect asserting a being which has such magical powers. And I'm not talking Houdini or the Amazing Randi here. By 'magic' I do not mean "the art of producing illusions by sleight of hand," for such tricks can be performed by human beings who possess no supernatural powers and make no use of supernatural powers. If you slip him enough martinis, a magician might even divulge how he does his tricks. No, I'm talking about the stuff of *story books*, e.g., Tolkein, C.S. Lewis, Harry Potter, the bible, etc. Since imagination can so easily dictate contents of story books, anything can happen in them. Some readers might even think such stories are true!

Moreover, the claim to magic frequently involves the designation of a *personal* agent whose consciousness has supernatural powers. According to its spokesmen, this magic-endowed personal agent can *wish* things into existence (cf. "creation ex nihilo"). Also, it can *revise* the identity of entities or substances (e.g., turning water into wine), or enable an entity to behave like an entity which it is not (e.g., men walking on unfrozen water), *just by wishing*. Oddly, we never get to see these amazing feats, but we've been assured that they are possible and that *someone* (who is unfortunately no longer around for questioning) has seen them.

The parallels here between magic and what Christianity claims about its deity, heroes and arch-villains, are indeed striking. Thus, so long as Christians want to claim that there is a supernatural being which stubbornly resides beyond the reach of our senses, I see no reason why the expression 'invisible magic being' does not subsume it. And contrary to what Anderson says, my use of this expression does in fact add to my analysis in that it covers more than just the Christian god; in addition to Christianity's deity, it also includes any rival deity which non-Christian religionists might imagine. Thus the so-called Frisian god is also dispatched by analysis, should Christian apologists find themselves tempted to hide behind it. It also includes Christianity's angels, demons, devils, even old Scratch himself, for all these are at one point or another portrayed to possess supernatural endowments. Demons, for instance, are said to have the power to afflict an otherwise healthy person with disease. Angels are said to have the power to come to us in our dreams, bearing telegrams from the ruling consciousness itself. Thus by using an expression which encompasses more than just one alleged entity, we are able to include the entire pantheon of imaginary personal agents which are said to be real, powerful, and yet plainly invisible.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [8:00 AM](#)

6 Comments:

[Daniel Morgan](#) said...

Bingo. Spot on.

[October 22, 2006 9:29 AM](#)

[Brother Blark](#) said...

Just wait till Discomfiter Manata gets a hold of this one...hoo boy, you're going down!

[October 22, 2006 10:33 AM](#)

[breakerslion](#) said...

I seem to recall that some moldering old Pope admonished his minions to make a distinction between what the alleged god does when he serves up miracles, and magic. One more inconsistency to that crowd is like serving up one more plate at the Smith Family Reunion.

All I can say is, "Roota...Zoota...Zoot!"

[October 22, 2006 5:45 PM](#)

[James Anderson](#) said...

Dawson,

Thanks for this enjoyable little riff on a parenthetical remark of mine. Now, getting back to the point... ;)

[October 23, 2006 1:15 PM](#)

[Brother Blark](#) said...

Bethrick, you've been DISCOMFITED again!

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2006/10/lucky-charms-atheology.html>

Try to stop being such a loser.

[October 23, 2006 1:48 PM](#)

[Simon](#) said...

Isn't the entire content of the Bible one long repetition of a bunch of slogans? (with nothing to back them up whatsoever)

[October 29, 2006 1:55 AM](#)