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# Harry Potter, The Goblet Of Fire ... And The Communion Of Saints?

## **Abstract**

This is a review of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005).

The now annual debate about the significance of Harry Potter for contemporary Christianity is upon us again. The supposed most significant contribution to the debate was made months ago with the simultaneous release of the sixth book in the *Harry Potter* series – *Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince* – and what were widely touted as, "the Pope's views on Potter!"

The general views of those who brandished Benedict's rule are correctly interpreted as, at least cautious, if not condemnatory of, "Potter's particular brand of Paganism."

One might rightly ask pertinent questions about what Benedict XVI "really" meant by the much published private statements he made in his former capacity as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. However, I am not interested in these questions here. In this review I merely want to illustrate some of the many Christian themes that lay latent in the latest celluloid adaptation of the adventures of Rowling's boy wizard.

Before I go any further here is a quick plot synopsis. When last we saw Harry his chief interests were Quidditch and saving flying horses. What a difference a year makes! In *The Goblet of Fire* we are presented with a full blown adolescent who in spite of his instruction in the finer arts of wizardry still finds that girls are an impossible mystery harder to crack than the most tongue-twisting incantation. It

seems that while Harry may have learned how to protect himself from Dementors in instalment three, he still can't get a date for the Yule Ball.

Amidst all of the usual striving of the teen age years, Harry also finds that he must compete in the Triwizard Tournament. The tournament is infamously dangerous and has cost numerous wizards their lives in the past. Harry's fellow competitors number three. Viktor Krum, from Bulgaria's Durmstrangs School of Wizardry, Fleur Delacour, the representative of Beauxbatons in France, and from Hogwarts the all-around good guy Cedric Diggory. The twist in this otherwise ordinary tale is that, as the name suggests, the Triwizard Tournament is normally contended by three wizards, not four. The addition of Harry's name to the three brave champions mentioned above stumps Dumbledore: could the dark hand of you-know-who be involved!?

The fourth film, as can be seen from the outline, is a right-of-passage story. Furthermore, like many of its predecessors in this distinguished genre, *The Goblet of Fire*, uses metaphor to express the perils that mark the transition into, and throughout, adult life. Thus, over three challenges, Harry must navigate an out-and-out predator in the guise of a dragon; step out into the deep without losing himself in Hogwarts Lake, and thread his way through a magical moral maze.

Throughout, the recurrent theme is of the importance of friendship, solidarity and community over the desire of the individual to set himself apart as Lord of others – the one above and independent of others. The contrasting options in life – that of solidarity and that of Lordship – are personified in Harry and Lord Voldemort respectively. While the former constantly helps and serves, and in turn is helped and served by his friends, the latter has no friends -- only crushed lackeys who fear the Dark Lord's power. Harry's friends attempt to serve each other selflessly without the intention to be Lord of each other. Voldemort has no intention of serving others except insofar as he can gain from it himself. As a consequence, his lackeys desert him as soon as he can no longer exercise his terror over them. The Lord may rule independently over others, but his position above and beyond others becomes his prison when his fortunes take a turn for the worse.

The not necessarily distinctively Christian values of friendship, solidarity and community take on a more noticeably Christian veneer when Harry receives help from family and friends that have gone before him into life's last great secret – death. The help of Harry's dead friends and family put one in mind of the community of saints that intercede for the living. For Rowling, it seems the bounds of friendship have a significance that stretches beyond the grave.

Here I would like to return to my opening comments. A lot has been said of late about how Western Europe is now post-Christian. In Roman Catholic circles

many people have wondered how to re-evangelise old Europe. Perhaps the answer lies in the latent Christian themes of popular fiction – including Harry Potter!?