

[For the purpose of this exemplar the significant religious question is: What is the nature of suffering as understood in Catholicism and Buddhism.]

Catholics believe God is a good and loving Creator who has created us in his image and likeness. Because of this belief Catholics need to understand why there is suffering and how. One belief is that we have free will so can make wrong choices that lead to suffering in the world. This understanding was developed by St Augustine in the early Church and is supported in the Bible, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (John Gospel). 1

Catholics have developed other beliefs to understand suffering as well. For example Irenaeus, also argued that suffering is necessary for spiritual development and is part of God's purpose. 1

A more contemporary idea is that God suffers too. Through Christ's suffering and pain on the cross of crucifixion, God submitted to the same suffering that many people do. 3

Catholic teaching on suffering is very significant as it affirms that God is good and the existence of suffering can be seen as a challenge to this belief. 1

This is why it is important for Catholics to understand the place of suffering. 3

Most Catholics would agree that suffering is a mystery of faith and quote Paul – "for now we see through a glass darkly but then we will see face to face". 1

Suffering is central to Buddhist teaching, and followers of Buddhism focus on understanding suffering and what it means for us. The Buddha said, "Life is suffering". Buddhists are encouraged to explore what suffering is. Buddhists think the problem is that we want to hold on to things in life and not let go and this attitude leads to suffering. 2

Suffering is clearly a very significant belief in Buddhism and its importance can be seen in the four Noble truths where the Buddha outlines the meaning of life:

1. Suffering exists
2. Suffering arises from attachment to desires
3. Suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases
4. Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path. 3

For both traditions, the existence of suffering is important and both think suffering is real for many people. They both think that people make choices that can cause suffering to happen to themselves and others. The difference is that for Catholics creation is good and created by God and that God has a purpose for suffering even if we do not fully understand it yet. For Buddhists' life is suffering and the goal is to find release from the cycle of suffering. This can be done through the way Buddhists behave. Buddhists try to find a way of life that stops suffering coming into being and, that cuts off its causes in one's life, attitudes and behaviour. Real change and real improvement are only possible when the right effort is made at the right tasks such as following the Eight fold Noble path. 3