

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

Catholics have a belief in a good and loving Creator who has created the world and we in his own image. Because of this belief, Catholics need to understand why there is suffering. Catholics believe in free will so can make wrong choices that can lead to suffering for us and 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 also have other beliefs to understand suffering. For example Irenaeus, argued that suffering is necessary for spiritual growth and is part of God's purpose for us. This is why it is important for Christians to understand the place of suffering in our lives. ③

Most Catholics would believe that it is a mystery of faith. ①

Suffering is also central to Buddhist teaching and followers of Buddhism focus on understanding suffering in the world. The Buddha said, "Life is suffering". Buddhists are encouraged to explore what suffering is. They 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 significance belief in Buddhism and its importance can be seen in the four Noble truths where the Buddha outlines the meaning of life. ③

For both traditions, the existence of suffering is important and both think suffering is real. They both think that people make choices that can cause suffering. The difference is that for Catholicism creation is good and created by God and that God has a purpose for suffering even if we do not fully understand it yet. In Buddhism, their life is suffering and the goal is to find release from the cycle of suffering. 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 to follow Buddhist teaching. In Catholicism, this would be similar to following the Ten Commandments. Many people do not understand what real suffering is and so find it hard to see how it is important to those who do suffer a great deal. ③

Buddhists believe if we follow the Eightfold Plan suffering can be eliminated, Catholics do not believe in the Eightfold plan. ③