

## *Interreligious Perspectives on Suffering*

### *— A Comparative Study of the Theory of Original Sin in Catholic Theology and the Theory of Avidyā in Mahayana Buddhism*

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**Abstract:** This study will compare and discuss the Catholic view of original sin and one of the fundamental ideas of Mahayana Buddhism, Avidyā, in order to assess the development of their basic theological concepts, to compare the connections and differences between the two faiths' views of suffering, to make sense of the connections between the two religions' views on suffering, life, and philosophy, and to identify ways to promote the discussion of ecumenical beliefs and to achieve greater harmony among believers of different cultures in contemporary society. A comparative study of the theological core of the fundamental theories of Catholicism and Mahayana Buddhism on the concepts of original sin and Avidyā can adequately complement the direction of inter-religious theological thought and, at the same time, open up new horizons in the study of the ecumenical values of contemporary faiths and the development of religious thought.

**Keywords:** Catholic theology, Mahayana Buddhism, suffering, inter-religious theology, Avidyā

## 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Buddhism and Christianity are two highly influential ecumenical religious systems: together, their adherents make up nearly one-third of the world's population. As of 2013, Buddhism had approximately 535 million adherents globally [1], while Christianity had more than 2 billion adherents worldwide [2]. At the same time, despite the fact that Buddhism and Christianity are two completely different belief systems, one belonging to the Abrahamic religions and the other born under the influence of Hinduism, the two religions are still inextricably linked [3]. Given the positive dynamics of the contemporary interreligious exchange of values, comparative studies of interreligious theological perspectives are also important and worth exploring. As Perry Schmidt-Leukel points out, comparative theology reflects the unstoppable trend of religious pluralism, offers reasonable alternatives to fundamentalism and relativism, reduces the potential for interreligious conflict, and highlights the truth-seeking dimension of interreligious dialogue [4]. Comparative studies of Buddhist and Christian theological concepts, broadly defined, have been conducted for over 100 years [5]. Many books comparing Christian and Buddhist theological thought, however, while there is no shortage of comparative studies in the fields of sociology and religion on the

theologies of Mahayana Buddhism and Catholicism, which are essential schools of Christianity and Buddhism, there is a relative lack of comparative studies on the Catholic and Mahayana Buddhist concepts of suffering, which are very important and relevant to the foundations of the doctrines.

Therefore, this paper will briefly discuss the understanding and definition of suffering in the Christian and Buddhist systems, and give relevant theological texts to support it. Secondly, the paper will discuss the definition of the Catholic concept of original sin and the deep connection between the concepts of original sin and suffering in the Catholic vision. Subsequently, the paper will discuss the definition of the Mahayana Buddhist view of Avidyā and show in detail the relationship and implications between the view of Avidyā and the Mahayana Buddhist view of suffering. Finally, the paper will compare and summarise the similarities and differences between the views of suffering based on different theological foundations and, to some extent, interpret them from a practical point of view.

## 2. What Is Suffering

The concept of suffering has been an important part of theological theories among religions. According to Schopenhauer, suffering is the moral consequence of our obsession with pleasure, a truth expressed in both the Christian doctrine of original sin and the Eastern religions' doctrine of rebirth [6]. Also, as Ekaterina Bobyeva and others have pointed out, the concept of suffering is an integral part of any world religion and, to some extent, constitutes an important category in religions such as Christianity [7]. Christianity and Buddhism are both relatively early developing religions, with Christianity first beginning to develop in the 1st century A.D. Christianity during the apostolic period was a sect influenced by the Hellenisation of Second Temple Judaism [8]. Early Buddhism, on the other hand, was born even earlier, appearing in northeastern India sometime in the late 6th and early 4th centuries B.C. and developing into a separate sect in the predominantly Hindu region of India [9]. The fact that Christian missionaries came to India as early as the 1st century A.D. and that Buddhism was introduced to Western Europe in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. suggests that Buddhism and Christianity were in some sense and some ways engaged in early exchanges and convergences [10], and Bentley argues that there is a real possibility that Buddhism may have influenced the early development of Christianity [6]. Meanwhile, Ernest De Bunsen conducted a similar study as early as 1880, noting the similarities between the oldest Buddhist accounts and the Christian tradition [11]. Thus, it is clear that the doctrinal and philosophical similarities between Buddhism and Christianity are not empty. Thus, the need for comparing the two religions in terms of their views on suffering is also largely necessary.

For Buddhism, the Sanskrit word for suffering is dukkha, which itself means unsatisfactoriness, pain and emptiness, and its significance is of paramount importance as the basis for the birth of the Four Noble Truths [10]. All schools of Buddhism, and especially Mahayana Buddhism, have explored and researched in depth the question of how to get rid of suffering and achieve Nirvana, and it can be said that to a certain extent, Mahayana Buddhism is based on the need to free all people from "all suffering". In a certain sense, the basic theology and teachings of Buddhism are basically related to suffering, which has an unshakeable core position. However, at the same time, it does not put suffering in a relatively positive position, encouraging and promoting suffering, but tends to understand the root cause of suffering after recognising and experiencing it, and from which it can be separated and enlightened, and ultimately get rid of the cycle of suffering and the cycle of the six paths of reincarnation. The origin of these sufferings, on the other hand, has a relatively uniform statement in Buddhism: they come from the five skandhas that are active in the condition of Avidyā [10]. What can be seen at this point is that the concept of the view of Avidyā itself is of primary importance in Buddhism, since it caused the formation of the underlying Buddhist doctrine of suffering. What can be seen thus far is that the concept of the view of Avidyā itself, is of prime importance in Buddhism,

as it caused the formation of the underlying Buddhist doctrine of suffering.

Furthermore, for the Christian system, suffering is even more of an aspect that cannot be avoided. From the post-apostolic and early patristic period onwards, the *raison d'être* and importance of suffering have been frequently mentioned by theologians, and in the Pauline Epistles St Paul refers to the positive significance of suffering:

“Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church (Col 1: 24).”

Pope John Paul II mentioned that St Paul wrote a significant number of insights of immense significance on how through suffering one discovers one's own way of participating in salvation, and that through suffering one is able to imitate Christ and participate more in His miracles, and that to a large extent St Paul made the redemptive significance of suffering understandable to people [12]. The martyred bishop of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch, on the other hand, interpreted his imminent martyrdom and suffering as a meaningful act of sharing in the suffering as well as the death of Jesus Christ through suffering, as well as completing his discipleship and resurrection in a new identity in Christ through suffering and death [13]. And the famous early Church Father Origen noted in his work that it is not just the Incarnate Word Jesus Christ who suffers, but God the Father Himself suffers. His suffering stems from the nature of infinite love and greatness, and because of great compassion, He will feel emotions that humans can feel [13]. What can be discerned is that suffering, in every sense, has a very fundamental place in Christian doctrine. Suffering, in particular, was critical in medieval Catholic mystical theology, where the necessity of suffering was mentioned many times, and suffering was seen to some extent as a prerequisite for understanding and imitating Christ, and ultimately, for unity with Him. Julian of Norwich, for example, discusses the necessity of suffering and its enlightenment several times in her famous work *Revelations of Divine Love*. Julian points out that in the earthly world, suffering is unavoidable and need not be avoided, and that in suffering one will come to a perfect silent contemplation of Christ's sufferings and find in them peace and happiness in the afterlife, and a closer approach to God and the process of unity with Him [14].

### 3. Original Sin and Suffering

For the root cause of the existence of suffering, most theologians point to the same cause - human original sin. Original sin as a state, as Augustine put it, has the nature of being passed on with human union and reproduction, and the passing on of original sin creates a continuation of suffering [15]. Augustine derived from Psalm 51:5 the idea that man is born with original sin, that even infants suffer from sin, and that original sin comes from the inheritance of Adam's sin [15].

" I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5, NKJV)."

According to Augustine, original sin brings deep suffering and deprives man of the instinct for good and the eternity of life [16]. The existential nature of fallen man is evil and limited, which is the root of all evil and suffering. Augustine's insistence on the heredity of original sin, the curse of necessity in original sin, and the importance of baptism profoundly influenced the views of some later theologies and natural law philosophies [17]. Athanasius, on the other hand, pointed out the relationship between original sin and suffering by arguing for the importance of Christ's incarnation. Athanasius stated that original sin caused humans to live under the threat of eternal death and suffering, but it also became the occasion for Christ's incarnation, bringing life to humans who would have been threatened with eternal death.

“...For speaking of the manifestation of the Savior to us, it is necessary also to speak of the origin of human beings, in order that you might know that our own cause was the occasion of his descent and that our own transgression evoked the Word’s love for human beings, so that the Lord both came to us and appeared among human beings. For we were the purpose of His embodiment, and for our salvation He so loved human beings as to come to be and appear in a human body [18].”

In Athanasius' theological vision, mankind is wholly dominated by original sin, which is so powerful that any self-willed resistance to it on the part of mankind is futile. In his view, only an external force can free mankind from its own descent into eternal death. And God, as the Most Good and Almighty Being, would surely deliver mankind from the power of original sin, and no being but the Divine could and would do this [18]. What can be discerned is that Athanasius also recognised the seriousness of original sin and its most fundamental impact on human suffering - and that it can only ever be addressed to some extent through the Incarnation of God. The eleventh-century theologian Anselm, on the other hand, re-emphasised the primordial nature of original sin and its great relevance to the earthly sufferings of mankind: Anselm argued that, because of Adam's fall and the original sin inscribed on mankind since then, mankind needs to make atonement for sin, but there is no way for mankind to do so on its own alone, because the state of original sin is so solid and immense that mankind has no ability or qualification to carry out the act of making atonement for it on its own, and that even acts of redemption carried out by mankind on its own would be futile [19]. And because of this great state of original sin, mankind is subject to various kinds of suffering, from the eternal fall into sin to the various kinds of sickness, death, or life's pains that arise on earth. Such a great state of original sin and the suffering it brings can only be borne by the incarnate Word - that is, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ - and the redemption of mankind and the restoration of all things to order. From this, it can be seen that the high degree of connection between original sin itself and suffering exists in the theories of most theologians, including Anselm.

Holding the same view as most of the theologians described above, Julian of Norwich also believed that original sin is the cause of human suffering. However, instead of explaining and examining the concept of original sin itself in detail, Julian turns his attention to the suffering that comes as a result of sin and the reasons why sin arises or appears. Julian suggests that the relationship between sin and suffering is intimately connected, and that only where there is no sin - such as in the Heaven or the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived before the Fall - is there no suffering, but only goodness abounds [14]. This is not to say, however, that there is no goodness where there is suffering. On the contrary, Julian points out that even though sin is the absence of goodness, the supreme goodness of God can be felt even in the midst of earthly suffering if one has true faith in God [14]. At the same time, what is evident is that Julian's perception of suffering is profound, and she finds that even though suffering and sin are evil and unavoidable, they can also serve a good purpose. Julian connects earthly suffering with love for God; Julian believes that earthly life is a place of suffering and a place where one learns how to love God [14]. In Julian's context, the suffering caused by man's sin has the potential to lead him to God, and suffering can be used for the good of mankind. Sin causes suffering in the earthly realm, but suffering in the earthly realm may lead man to love God, have practical faith, and ultimately pave the way to heaven. And fellow medieval mystic Henry Suso, in his book *A Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, compares the crucifixion of Christ to a rainbow, invoking the hope and fulfilment of the atonement that Christ brings to people [20]. Suso also emphasised many times in his mystical writings how human suffering and atonement in this life bring man closer to God and free him from the eternal death brought about by original sin. Aquinas, on the other hand, argues that human suffering is rooted in defects caused by sin, that suffering is an expression of man's defective weaknesses and marks his distance from divine inviolability, and that original sin is not only a human sin, but also constitutes, through Adam, a natural sin [21]. According to Thomas, original sin is

primarily a deviation of the human soul from its proper obedience to God, and original sin is an excessive tendency stemming from a disruption of the harmony necessary for original justice [22]. Thus, in a way, Aquinas sees original sin as implying the blindness of discord and injustice, i.e., the confusion of the will and the soul [22]. On the other hand, for contemporary Catholic theology, many scholars have also conducted personal research analyses and new parsings of the concept of original sin. Ratzinger, for example, reiterates the definition of original sin and points out the misleading nature of the term original sin - Ratzinger states that original sin is a hereditary state, not a "criminal act" [23]. Original sin is equated with a chain of bondage and slavery that binds man in a state of depravity, sin and suffering from which only God can deliver him and from which he himself cannot escape [23]. It is for this reason that the Catholic view of original sin is closely linked to the view of suffering.

#### 4. Avidyā and Suffering

In the case of Mahayana Buddhism, its view of suffering is profoundly linked to an important concept, Avidyā. The concept of Avidyā itself exists in both Buddhism and Hinduism, but is slightly different; with Mahayana Buddhism focusing more on a metaphysical perspective on how Avidyā leads to suffering [24] nearly Buddhist texts and Mahayana Buddhism, Avidyā can be translated as "not seeing the light" [25], which in itself implies a state of metaphysical blindness and a lack of realisation of the truths and essences that are at the root of human suffering [26]. What can be discerned is that the state of Avidyā is a fundamental factor in what Mahayana Buddhism considers to be the cause of human suffering. Briefly, Avidyā in the Buddhist system can be explained as the state of blindness and stupidity in human nature [27].

And the earliest appearance and explanation of Avidyā in Buddhism can be traced back to Volume 9 of the Saṃyukta Āgama, which explains Avidyā as the concept of turning the insubstantial into the real due to the fact that the world itself is empty and not real, and the concept of turning the insubstantial into the real by transforming things that do not exist into the six senses, by sensing sights, sounds, and touches and generating joys, anger, sorrows, and fears, etc., is an embodiment of Avidyā [28]. Such a state of affairs brings suffering, and the struggle of all things in ignorance and unawareness due to the cycle of the six paths is suffering. Avidyā itself means "blindness to the light," and to a certain extent, such blindness in the cycle of the six paths is the very embodiment of Avidyā, which is undoubtedly suffering. At the same time, unlike the Christian system, where some theologians recognise the positive effects of suffering arising from original sin, for Mahayana Buddhism Avidyā itself brings only suffering, and at the same time, such suffering is meaningless - which goes to the bottom of the basic concept of Buddhism: the origin of Avidyā. In the Buddhist perspective, Avidyā arises primarily out of people's blindness, their failure to understand the concept that everything is empty, that there is no self-nature, and therefore their tendency to seek what is not real, to seek what is empty, and to generate karma as a result, and ultimately, as a result of that karma, to turn around in the cycle of births and deaths, unable to detach themselves from their suffering [29]. Clearly, in the Buddhist perspective, the source of all suffering is related to Avidyā. In Buddhism, there is the theory of the twelve karmas, which refers to the karmic sufferings that arise in the cycle of rebirth [30], and the first of the twelve karmas is Avidyā, which, to a certain extent, clearly demonstrates that in the Buddhist theological perspective, it is due to Avidyā that the other eleven karmas are brought into existence. As a result, various schools of Buddhism have summarised how to cut off Avidyā. For the Mādhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, everything should not have any distinctions, but be naturally empty, and the Mādhyamaka school believes that any theory of existence, whether it be the theories of other Buddhist schools, theories of other religions, or secular reasoning is meaningless, and that there is no theory that is absolutely true [31]. Whatever the theories and doctrines are, the distinctions and disputes in them are all separative theatre arising out of Avidyā,

and the Madhyamaka school of thought believes that one should not cling to these theories themselves, which only create separations, because clinging and debating bring disputes and suffering, and in fact, these theories and things are insubstantial [32]. The Madhyamaka school believes that if the suffering brought about by Avidyā is to be eliminated, then any attachment should be eliminated, and in particular the perverted perception of the nature of things is to be eliminated, and even that attachment to such elimination should not exist. The Madhyamaka school expresses a quest for complete emptiness, and even the concept of noumena in Buddhist teaching should be abolished, for it is the clinging to illusory concepts that cause ātma-grāha, and ātma-grāha brings suffering. Only by destroying ātma-grāha and Avidyā can one be free from the illusion of birth and death, which is a ceaseless cycle of twelve causes, and free from all suffering [32].

And for the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism, there have been several references to Avidyā. The Yogacara school's main view of Avidyā is that the reason why Avidyā arises and causes suffering is because people are ignorant of this school's idea of Universal Knowledge of Dharmas. In the Narayana Volume 1, there is an exposition of the vexation and knowledge obstacles, and it is pointed out that the vexation and knowledge obstacles are what the Yogacara school refers to as Avidyā, and that because of these two different kinds of karmic obstacles, beings are unable to attain the state of emptiness, as if they were blinded by a fog, groping around in the darkness, and unable to attain enlightenment to free themselves from suffering [33]. For the Yogacharas, the way to eliminate such suffering and get rid of Avidyā is through the theory of consciousness, which holds that all circumstances change because of one's awareness, and that all causes, effects, and illusions arising in the external world come from one's own consciousness [33]. As can be seen, both the Madhyamaka and Yogachara schools of Mahayana Buddhism believe that in order to eliminate suffering, Avidyā must be eliminated through the destruction of the self-consciousness of the Self, but with a different methodological approach; the Madhyamaka school focuses on the fact that the most crucial cause of Avidyā and suffering is the development of a discriminatory mind, which makes illusory categories, while the Yogachara school believes that self-consciousness and suffering are caused by the Self, while the Yoga school believes that self-consciousness and suffering are caused by the Self and that the Self is not the Self. The Yogachara school, on the other hand, believes that self-consciousness is too strong to realise that everything is a barrier created by self-consciousness, and that being blinded by the fog of self-creativity and falling into real attachment is the root cause of Avidyā and suffering.

## 5. A Comparative Study of Original Sin and Avidyā

As an essential factor in causing suffering in both religions, a comparative study of the Christian view of original sin and the Buddhist view of suffering as revealed in Avidyā is meaningful and necessary. And as summarised from the above study, there are both inter-religious commonalities and differences between the original sin view and the Avidyā view.

The similarities are mainly in the following points:

Firstly, there is a certain degree of commonality in the definitions of original sin and Avidyā. Aquinas' formulation of original sin as a state of unjust blindness has much in common with the Mahayana Buddhist conception of the Avidyā view as blindness and obscurantism, in a sense. To a large extent, both religions believe that the root cause of human suffering arises from a state of blindness and ignorance, and that this leads to the creation and infinite extension of suffering.

Secondly, both religions, to some extent, consider the original sin or Avidyā, the root cause of suffering, to be non-ontological. In the case of original sin, the state of depravity conferred on man as a result of Adam and Eve's actions is historical, not inherent in the moment of creation, and is not an attribute possessed by human beings in and of themselves. And Avidyā is likewise non-eternal; Avidyā itself is empty [32] and does not exist in and of itself, not having existed in any being from the beginning, and so, in this light, it can be seen that both are non-eternal beings, and can be deduced

to some extent from the two religions' views on the non-eternal and eternal existence of suffering.

Thirdly, Catholicism and Mahayana Buddhism can also be said to be on the same path in addressing the issue of suffering out of the original sin view or Avidyā view. In the Catholic view, although original sin is prevalent among human beings, thanks to Christ's salvation they can unite with God and make up for the defects and sufferings arising from original sin by means of self-abandonment and the cultivation of virtue, etc., while in the Mahāyāna Buddhist view, the cultivation as well as acts of compassion and selflessness can also lead to renunciation of ātma-grāha and freedom from the primordial state of Avidyā [34].

However, while there are some similarities between original sin and the Avidyā view, there are also differences in the two religions' understanding of the source of suffering.

Firstly, the original sin view elaborates to some extent on the theory that original sin is the root cause of human suffering, as well as its being a state of affairs that has existed and been inherited by mankind since they left the Garden of Eden [35]. Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, believes that Avidyā comes from the twelve karmic reincarnations, and that this stems from human obsession, which itself contributes to the creation and persistence of Avidyā, which, unlike the state of original sin that arises from having a definite historical source (Adam and Eve's sin), Avidyā is related to the actions that arise from the cycle of human births and rebirths. One is an extension of the sin committed by Adam and Eve, while the other stems from the existence of the primal forces that lead to the ego. While both concepts of suffering are non-ontological and to some extent inherited, the underlying causes of their creation and development are different [36].

In addition, there is a different understanding of the solution to suffering. Most Catholic theologians believe that human beings cannot avoid suffering on earth, and that they can only be permanently freed from suffering and surrounded by love and joy afterlife when they enter the kingdom of heaven and become united with God. At the same time, the Catholic Church believes that suffering has a deep theological meaning and value on earth. To suffer and even to be martyred on earth is in part to re-enact and personally experience the Passion of Jesus Christ, which is as meaningful and beneficial to the afterlife as the contemplation of Christ's Passion. In the case of Mahayana Buddhism, since suffering is based on the Avidyā, and because of the Mahayana view of reincarnation, its main purpose is not to "endure suffering" in this world, as in Catholicism, but to actively seek to be completely free from suffering (and from reincarnation) in the cycle of life. The main aim is, therefore, not to "endure suffering" in this life, as in Catholicism, but to actively search for a way to escape suffering completely in the cycle of life.

In sum, to a certain extent the concept of Avidyā differs from the Catholic concept of original sin in a certain sense, and its focus is different, but there are also similarities and cross-fertilisation between the Catholic and Mahayana Buddhist perceptions of and responses to suffering in terms of self-renunciation, selflessness, and comparative contemporary practices of virtue. As Alfred Skold and Peter Lond point out, the forms of suffering we see today are not the same as those we have seen before, and what makes them so special is that the social and cultural contexts in which they occur have changed over the course of history [37]. Suffering has always been a sociological concern, which means that many contemporary forms of suffering are forms of social suffering - they are caused or produced by the social environment, and each particular period produces new forms of suffering [37]. Society and culture can mostly be understood as ways of dealing with suffering - avoiding meaninglessness, pain and chaos, so that society - like life itself - is built on suffering [38].

As religions that have studied suffering in depth, Catholicism and Mahayana Buddhism can also use their great influence and rich theological practices and texts to address some of the new patterns of suffering brought about by modern life. For example, through the Catholic view of suffering, people can find meaning in suffering and, to a certain extent, seek solace through faith. At the same time, by conveying its view of seeking hope and love and salvation in the midst of suffering,

Catholicism can go a long way towards solving common modern problems such as mental health issues and ethical issues arising from new technologies, thus enabling people to better cope with the new pressures that modern life may bring. For Mahayana Buddhism, the philosophical theories of the Madhyamaka and Yogachara schools can provide modern people with tools to understand suffering and reality, so that they can better see the impermanence of suffering and the nature of suffering in modern life, to better regulate their lives and cultivate their ability to detach themselves from suffering, and that such a view of suffering can enable them to better cope with the issue of the existential value of the self as well as the issue of emotions, so that their minds can be calmer. Emotional problems, make one's mind more calm and compassionate, and alleviate the problems of excessive anxiety and distress that modern life may bring. In summary, there are both similarities and differences between Mahayana Buddhism and the Catholic view of suffering based on Avidyā and original sin. However, through the increasingly frequent exchanges and communication between contemporary religions, people can better enhance the quality of their lives through the theological practice of the interreligious view of suffering, and have more responses to the negative directions of modern life, which can also enhance the breadth and depth of interreligious studies.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper first analyses the Catholic and Mahayana Buddhist views of suffering, explains the definition and development of the different religious views of suffering, and compares and analyses the characteristics of the two religions' views of suffering and their implications. Subsequently, the paper focuses on the relationship between the Catholic view of original sin and its view of suffering, starting with theological texts from different periods and providing a deeper interpretation of the Catholic view of original sin and suffering. From there, it discusses the commonalities and differences between the Mahayana Buddhist and Catholic views of suffering. At the same time, the paper also examines and interprets the Madhyamaka and Yogachara views of the Avidyā view in Mahayana Buddhism and the reasons for its emergence, and discusses how the Avidyā view influences the emergence of suffering in Mahayana Buddhism, and the tight connection between suffering and the Avidyā view. Finally, the paper analyses the commonalities and differences between the two religions' views on suffering from a comparative theological perspective, and how the theological ideas such as the two religions' views on suffering can be applied to modern society from a practical perspective.

A comparative study of the original sin and Avidyā views is a good direction for comparative theological research. In a way, the original sin and Avidyā views try to explain the causes of human suffering and sin in the world from their roots. By comparing the two, we can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Mahayana Buddhist and Catholic theological ideas about the root causes of suffering in the world. The original sin view and the Avidyā view represent the core concepts in these two religious traditions, respectively, and attempt to explain the root of why suffering and sin exist in the world. Such comparisons help to reveal their commonalities and differences, and in addition, comparative studies of inter-religious views of suffering help to promote inter-religious dialogue and understanding, providing opportunities to explore in greater depth the complex issues of human nature, suffering and death, which are not only about religion, but also the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of human civilisation as a whole. Such a study is significant and through it, the wisdom and beliefs behind different cultures and religions can be more fully understood and appreciated, and can provide positive and useful guidance for human life and thought.

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