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Sin in Tiantai Buddhism and Christianity: A Comparison Between Chih-i and Pope Gregory I

Wangyu Tang
356335898@qq.com

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**Sin in Tiantai Buddhism and Christianity:
A Comparison Between Chih-i and Pope Gregory I**

By: Wangyu Tang

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE AS SPECIFIED FOR MAJORS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ASIAN STUDIES AT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY, SOUTH ORANGE, NEW JERSY.

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THESIS TITLE:

**Sin in Tiantai Buddhism and Christianity: A Comparison Between Chih-i and
Pope Gregory I**

BY

Wangyu Tang

APPROVED BY

DATE

Jeffrey Rice, Ph.D.



Jeff Rice 9/6/18

Lawrence Frizzell

Lawrence Frizzell, D.Phil.

September 6, 2018

Yan Wang

Yan Wang, Ph.D.

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Contents

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Approval form

Acknowledgements

Abstract

I. INTRODUCTION	- 1 -
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	- 3 -
A. The life of Chih-i	- 3 -
B. The life of Pope Gregory the Great.....	- 6 -
III. SIN IN TWO RELIGIONS	- 8 -
A. Sin and religious practice in Tiantai Buddhism	- 8 -
1. Brief introduction of Tiantai philosophy.....	- 8 -
2. Chih-i's teaching on sin	- 12 -
3. Religious practice and activity of Tiantai Buddhism	- 16 -
B. Sin and religious practice in medieval Christianity/Catholicism.....	- 21 -
1. Brief introduction of Christian moral philosophy/theology.....	- 21 -
2. Pope Gregory I's teaching on sin.....	- 27 -
3. Religious practice and activity of Christianity.....	- 29 -
IV. Analysis and comparison.....	- 34 -
A. Evil, vice and sin.....	- 34 -
B. Sin from outside and inside.....	- 36 -
C. Differences in cardinal sins.....	- 37 -
D. Contemplation.....	- 39 -
V. Conclusion	- 41 -

ABSTRACT

Buddhism and Christianity are two of the major religions in the world. This paper is going to compare sin in Medieval Tiantai Buddhism with Medieval Catholicism, with examples of Chih-i (Zhiyi) and Gregory's teaching on sin. This article investigates sin from the aspects of pride, greed and sources of sin, cardinal sins, and practice of contemplation in the two religions. The two religions share common ground in the question of sin, yet there are differences in the source of sins and the definition of cardinal sins. In addition, the teachings of Chih-i and Gregory the Great on the practice of contemplation revealed that contemplation played dissimilar roles in two religions. Finally, it concludes that there are resemblances in two religions that connect East Asia and the West, which calls for future cooperation that brings a message of salvation to all human beings.

Key words: Sin, Buddhism, Catholicism, Chih-i, Pope Gregory I, Contemplation

I. INTRODUCTION

What is religion? Why do people study religion? Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud thinks that religion is an illusion.¹ Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), an English philosopher, biologist, sociologist argued that ancestor worship is the root of every religion.² Another answer given by English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tyler (1832-1917) is that religion is a belief in spiritual beings.³

Tiantai Buddhism and Christianity endure the test of time, leaving profound influence on East Asia and the West even today. This paper is going to discuss the topic of sin in Medieval Tiantai Buddhism and Medieval Christianity, to discover what is seen as sin in the two religions and how to conquer these evils. It will reveal the differences and similarities between the two in regard to sin, to provide a glimpse into aspects of each religion.

“From the philosophical standpoint, and in terms of its influence on other schools in China, Korea, and Japan, the Lotus or Tiantai teaching is of major importance.”⁴ Even though the basic scripture of Tiantai Buddhism—the *Lotus of the Wonderful Law* is from North India or Central Asia, it has distinctively Chinese features because it was founded on the interpretation work by the great Chinese monk Chih-i (Zhiyi 智顓, 538–597). And the name Tiantai Buddhism indicates its geographical origin—Tiantai (Heavenly Terrace), which is in Zhejiang province of China, where Chih-i

¹ As quoted by Robert Crawford, 2002, *What is Religion?* Routledge Press, p. 2

² Ibid.,

³ Ibid., p.1

⁴ Chan, Wing-tsit, et al. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600*. Edited by Wm. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., Columbia University Press, 1999. p. 444

taught.⁵

Another important figure in this paper is Gregory the Great (540-604). He was Pope of the Catholic Church from 590 to 604 and recognized as one of the greatest Popes. Gregory entered public life after following the liberal study course of the day. He became Prefect of the City and Governor of Rome sometime before 573. In 574, he determined to give up his career in the secular world and became a monk. He composed the famous work of *Morals on Job* in Constantinople and addressed the topic in various familiar conferences to the little community of his monks he had brought with him from Rome.⁶ Among his most important works are *Morals on Job*, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, *Dialogues* and his *Homilies on the Gospel*.

To achieve human salvation, it is necessary to see into the origin of human problems—sin. “In spite of the historical differences in their origins, Buddhism and Christianity present a structurally similar, twofold problematic based on the understanding of salvation as the solution to the problem of the meaning of human existence in the world.”⁷

This paper is going to compare the Medieval Tiantai Buddhism and Christianity about the topic of sin with the examples of Chih-i and Gregory the Great, beginning with the introduction of Chih-i and Gregory the Great’s lives. Next it gives brief introduction of Tiantai philosophy. What follows is the concept of sin in Chih-i’s teaching and the religious practice in Tiantai Buddhism. Then it presents the brief

⁵ Chan, Wing-tsit, et al. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600*. Edited by Wm. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., Columbia University Press, 1999. p. 444

⁶ Dom Cuthbert Butler, 1922, *Western Mysticism*, Harper & Row press, p.65

⁷ Paul O. Ingram and Frederick J. Streng (ed), 1986, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal And Transformation*, Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press. p.15

introduction of Christian moral philosophy, Gregory's teaching on sin and religious practice of contemplation in Catholicism. After that, this paper discovers that two religions share a similar concept of sin yet there is difference in the aspect of where sins come from and meaning of cardinal sins. Besides, the religious practice of contemplation in two religions also have similarities and differences.

Finally, this paper aims to help people from different religious background to understand each other by comparison, to see the common features and differences between the religions in an academic way.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The life of Chih-i

According to professor David W. Chappell (1940-2004), a Buddhist scholar specializing in Tiantai Buddhism, one of the major problems in the development of Chinese Buddhism was the reconciliation and integration of numerous doctrines and practices from Indian Buddhism.⁸

Chinese historian and philosopher Jiyu Ren (1916-2009) revealed that after Buddhism came into China, it went through four phases until the “Chinese Buddhism” came into being:

1. introduction—Han to Eastern Jin dynasty (206 B.C.E.-420);
2. reconciliation—Northern and Southern dynasty (420-589);
3. creation—Sui and Tang dynasty (581-907);

⁸ Chegwan, *T'ien-T'ai Buddhism: An Outline of the Fourfold Teachings*. Translated by David W. Chappell. Published by Daiichi-Shobo, Distributed by the University Press of Hawaii 1983, p.21

4. Confucianization—Song to Qing dynasty (960-1912).⁹

At the first phase, due to the language barrier, exotic translators needed Chinese assistants to help them translate sutras. Inevitably, the local languages and ideas will be included in those sutras to help convey their meaning. The Chinese helpers played the roles of reconcilers. As the founder of Tiantai Buddhism, Chih-i based on the *Lotus Sutra* (法华经) and exploited its creativity and created the Tiantai school. Tiantai Buddhism is the milestone of Chinese Buddhism moving from the reconciling stage into the creative stage.¹⁰

Contemporary Chinese scholar Guiming Pan expounds that Chih-i was born in the late Northern and Southern dynasty, he saw the end of various dynasties and even experienced the fall of Liang (502-557) and Chen (557-589.) As a descendant of officials of Southern dynasty, Chih-i was tormented by the political turbulence and social unrest.¹¹

Another main factor that influenced Chih-i is the repression of Buddhism by Emperor Wu (543-578) of Northern Zhou. After the repression by Emperor Wu, various monks become a serious social problem for the Sui dynasty and even the early Tang dynasty. The monks who crossed river to the border of Chen influenced the later development of southern Buddhism and promoted the interaction between northern and southern Buddhism.¹²

Northern and Southern dynasty witnessed the soaring of Chinese Buddhism.

⁹ Guiming Pan, 1996, *A Critical Biography of Zhiyi*, Nanjin University Press. Preface by Jiyu Ren. p.2

¹⁰ Ibid., p.3

¹¹ Guiming Pan, 1996, *A Critical Biography of Zhiyi*, Nanjin University Press. p.3-4

¹² Ibid., p.5

Chinese Buddhism began to take shape in Northern Wei (386-534). Even with the huge blow from the first Buddhist Repression, the Buddhism thrived rapidly under the encouragement from the fourth emperor of Northern Wei—Wencheng. The truth behind such rapid recovery is that prince Huang (428-451), the eldest son of Emperor Wu, postponed the announcement of persecution. Therefore, monks with early notice can hide deep in the mountains together with Buddhist sutras and statues.¹³

The unprecedented development of Buddhism in Northern dynasty brought countless societal problems. Finally, it led to the second repression to Buddhism. This gave us a clue about Chih-i's struggle to fight for Buddhism. Unlike the past, rulers of Southern dynasty advocates Buddhism as a method helping to rule the country rather than just blessing the country.¹⁴

Chih-i lectured for years on the written text of the *Lotus*—one of the most popular of Mahayana sutras. It was not mainly a philosophical text, but a guide to salvation through practice. His pupil Guanding (561-632) recorded Chih-i's deliberations, which was later known as “Three Great Works” of the Tiantai school: the *Words and Phrases of the Lotus* (Fahua wenju 法华文句), the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus* (Fahua xuanyi 法华玄义), and the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (Mohe zhiguan 摩诃止观.) As a member of southern gentry, Chih-i had the distinct feature of philosophical character of south Buddhists. On the other hand, his teacher Huisi (514-577) came from the north. The northern Buddhists were developing a religion of faith and discipline. Therefore, Chih-i concluded that “the contemplative

¹³ Ibid., p.7

¹⁴ Ibid., p.8-9

and philosophical approach to religion were like two wings of a bird.” As a result, the Tiantai school has the characteristic of strong philosophical content, meanwhile even stronger emphasis on the meditative practice.¹⁵

B. The life of Pope Gregory the Great

As recorded in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Gregory I (540-604) is also known as Gregory the Great, Saint, Pope, Doctor of the church. Besides, he is certainly one of the most notable figures in Ecclesiastical History. He has undeniable influence in many aspects of the doctrine, the organization and the discipline of the Catholic church. Without his work the formal evolution of medieval Christianity would be almost inexplicable. And almost all the leading principles of later Catholicism can be traced to Gregory the Great. This praise is quoted from a learned non-Catholic writer F. H. Dudden by G. Roger Hudleston to display the roles that Gregory played in medieval Catholicism.¹⁶

There is an ancient Chinese saying that heroes emerge in turbulent days (亂世出英雄。). Pope Gregory I experienced the political turmoil of wars after the fallen of Roman Empire. Meanwhile, Chih-i was living in wars after the collapse of Han dynasty. It is the same misery of human suffering that strengthened their minds to bring a message of salvation to human beings.

Pope Gregory I was born to an aristocratic family in Rome. Gregory’s family was

¹⁵ Chan, Wing-tsit, et al. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600*. Edited by Wm. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., Columbia University Press, 1999. p. 444

¹⁶ G. Roger Hudleston, Charles G. Herbermann (ed.) 1909, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.VI, Robert Appleton Company, p. 780

wealthy and has strong connection to the Roman Church. As a young aristocratic he possessed the advantages of fortune—a palatial estate on the Caelian Hill and the best education available at that time. During his childhood, between 546 to 547 alone, control of the city of Rome shifted three times between Gothic and imperial hands. Fortunately, Gregory's family survived the political crisis. The Gothic Wars drastically hastened the fall of the once mighty capital of Roman Empire. The city of Rome along with its many monuments were abandoned by the time Gregory reached adolescence. The experience of living in a nearly deserted city accounts for the occasional apocalyptic characters in his writing.¹⁷

Rome was shaking under the shadow of barbarian Lombards. Since their appearance in Italy in 568, they had been ravaging its countryside and cities for more than twenty years.¹⁸ In the year around 586, Gregory was recalled to Rome, and joyfully returned to St. Andrew's monastery. Soon he became its abbot. The monastery gained popularity under his energetic governance. When St. Gregory elected Pope in 590, he wrote personally to the Emperor Maurice (590-602), pleading him not to confirm the election due to his love of cloister life. But in the end, six months later he was announced Pope after the Emperor's confirmation.¹⁹

Gregory had profound influence in Rome. To begin with, he banished all the lay attendants, pages and so on to achieve monastic simplicity. Even the control of

¹⁷ George E. Demacopoulos.2015, *Gregory the Great : ascetic, pastor, and first man of Rome*, University of Notre Dame Press. p. 1-2

¹⁸ Joseph P. McClain, 1956, Rev..*The Doctrine of Heaven in the Writings of Saint Gregory the Great*, The Catholic University of America Press. p.1

¹⁹ G. Roger Hudleston, Charles G. Herbermann (ed.) 1909, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.VI, Robert Appleton Company, Horace K. Mann, *Gregory I* p. 782

military powers fell to the Pope because there were no masters of soldiers living in Rome. Gregory also cared for people's spiritual needs once the temporal needs were being provided. Therefore, he provided countless sermons. These sermons, which reached immense crowds, are mostly simple, practical expositions of Scripture. The preacher's mastery of the *Bible* is remarkable, his regular use of anecdote not only well illustrate the point in hand, but also paved the way for other preachers of the Middle Ages.²⁰

What is more remarkable in all the valuable works Gregory had accomplished during his fourteen-years of pontificate is that he was in constant ill-health. "His mind, naturally serious, was filled with despondent forebodings, and his continual bodily pains were increased and intensified."²¹

Regardless of his illness, he still managed to fulfill his work as Pope and left precious works. The famous examples are his *Commentary on Job*, also known as *Moralia on Job*, which is based on Gregory's talks on the Book of Job in the *Bible*. *The Rule for Pastors* is "the most thorough pastoral treatise of the patristic era."²²

III. SIN IN TWO RELIGIONS

A. Sin and religious practice in Tiantai Buddhism

1. Brief introduction of Tiantai philosophy

The doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism lies in Chih-i's threefold truth, which includes

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Ibid., p.786

²² Gregory the Great, 2007, Translation with Introduction by Geogre E. Demacopoulos, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. p. 13

“Emptiness (空), Conventional Existence (假) and the Middle (中).” Scholars from East and West agree that the threefold truth originated from the two truths (twofold truth)—theory of Mādhyamika philosophy. Modern Chinese scholar Dr. Li Silong from Beijing University thinks that *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* gives an explicit explanation regarding the two truths.²³ Nāgārjuna (龙树), an influential Indian Buddhist philosopher lived in the 2nd century says:

诸佛依二谛，为众生说法，一以世俗谛，二第一义谛。

若人不能知，分别于二谛，则于深佛法，不知真实义。²⁴

All Buddhas depend on two truths

In order to preach the Dharma to sentient beings.

The first is the worldly mundane truth.

The second is the truth of supreme meaning.

If one is not able to know the distinction between the two truths,
one cannot know the true meaning of the profound Buddha Dharma.²⁵

The Indian monk Qingmu (青目), interpreter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* from the 4th century, further gave his notation:

“世俗谛者，一切法性空，而世间颠倒故生虚妄法，于世间是实；诸贤圣真知颠倒性，故知一切法皆空无生，于圣人是第一义谛名为实。诸佛依是二谛而为众生说法，若人不能如实分别二谛，则于甚深佛法，不知实义。”²⁶

Which Li interprets as follows: The “twofold truth” points out the reality in Buddhism, which means the sacred and the profane have different understandings of “truth” in Buddhism. This results in the occurrence of distinction between worldly truth (世俗谛) and truth of supreme meaning (第一义谛.) The Buddha and

²³ 李四龙，《智顓“三谛圆融”的学术分析》，2001年第2期，《宗教学研究》p.74 51-1069/B Li Silong

²⁴ 《中论》龙树，姚秦鸠摩罗什译，青目释“观四谛品”，《大正藏》卷30，第32页 Qingmu

²⁵ Translation as quoted in Paul Swanson, 1989, *The Foundation of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, p.1

²⁶ 《中论》龙树，姚秦鸠摩罗什译，青目释“观四谛品”，《大正藏》卷30，第32页

Bodhisattva use this twofold truth to transform the profane into the sacred, to help sentient beings cut their foolishness with falsehood and hence to realize that all is emptiness (一切皆空.)²⁷

This raises another question. What is conventional truth (worldly truth)? As Swanson quotes, Indian monk Candrakīrti (560-640?) proposed that it is “a ‘covering,’ ‘obscuration,’ or ‘occlusion.’ Our mistaken understanding of the phenomenal world is like a covering of ignorance which obscures the true nature of reality.”²⁸ It is also identical with the mutual co-arising of all phenomena as interdependent. In this case, conventional truth is a synonym of supreme truth. The fundamental Buddhist causality theory which puts the interdependency and co-arising of everything. Another point is the realm of traditions and ordinary language. That means: conventional truth is conceptualized and comprehended through the medium of language and discriminative, cognitive thought. Also, it contains the idea of *upāya* (pedagogy)—the skillful or expedient means to express the supreme truth. The assumption is that what is conceptualized and expressed in language is already partially removed from true reality, therefore can never sufficiently express it. This leads us to the supreme truth (highest meaning of truth), which is the correct understanding and true content of reality, and it is beyond any verbalization or conceptualization.²⁹

As mentioned above, there is an insurmountable gap between the two truths.

²⁷ 李四龙,《智顓“三谛圆融”的学术分析》, 2001年第2期,《宗教学研究》p.7451-1069/B

²⁸ Paul Swanson, 1989, *The Foundation of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, p.2

²⁹ Ibid.,

Consequently, this stimulates a heated debate among Buddhist scholars in Northern and Southern Dynasties. Whether the two truths refer to the different realms of the saint and the common man? Or are they two methods for Buddha and Bodhisattva preaching to sentient beings?

Chih-i's contribution towards this debate is that he developed his own interpretation of it—the concept of threefold truth and the principle of three thousand realms in a single thought moment(一念三千.) East and West scholars believe that the threefold truth comes from *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna says, “all things which arise through conditional co-arising, I explain as emptiness. Again, it is a conventional designation. Again, it is the meaning of the Middle Path.”³⁰ (因缘所生法，我说即是空，亦为是假名，亦是中道义。) ³¹ In Swanson's mind's eye, “the ‘emptiness’ means the lack of substantial Being, not only the absence of anything which exists in and of itself and never changes, but also an eternal essence.” Then he further explained, “it is not a nihilistic denial of all existence. It is the denial of existence as *svabhāva*, literally ‘own being.’” Swanson concluded that co-arising, emptiness, conventional existence and the middle are four ways to express one reality instead of four separate existences.³² The emptiness(空) parallels the supreme meaning(第一义谛), the conventional existence(假) correlates with the worldly truth(世俗谛). It doesn't mean that the middle path(中) governs the former two; however, it was generated by those and connect them simultaneously. Without either

³⁰ Translation by Paul Swanson, 1989, *The Foundation of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, p.4-5

³¹ 《中论》 龙树，姚秦鸠摩罗什译，青目释“观四谛品” 开篇偈

³² Paul Swanson, 1989, *The Foundation of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, p.4-6

of them, the middle path will collapse. As Chih-i explained it, “the ‘perfect threefold truth’ means that it is not only the Middle Path which completely includes the Buddha-Dharma, but also the real and the mundane[truths]. This is threefold truth as perfectly integrated; one-in-three and three-in-one.”³³(圆三谛者, 非但中 道具足佛法, 真、俗亦然。三谛圆融, 一三三一。) ³⁴

2. Chih-i’s teaching on sin

The *Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight & Dhyana Meditation* (Xiao Zhiguan 小止观) is another important work of Chih-i, unlike the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (Moho Chih-kuan 摩诃止观) it only has less than a hundred pages, but it provides guide in the essential preliminary stage for contemplation. Within it is found Chih-i’s teaching about sins people should avoid—sins of five desires, sins of self-hindrances, and sin of avarice, anger, foolishness and arrogance.

a. Sin of five desires

According to Chih-i, there are five stimulations from outside world which can lead people sin.

- 1) “Desire for forms: the renunciation of the desire for forms refers to such forms as the stately and decorous shapes and features of men and women, including alluring eyes, long eyebrows, red lips and white teeth, as well as

³³ Idib., p7

³⁴ 智顗, 《妙法莲华经玄义》, 卷 33

things regarded in the world as precious.”³⁵

- 2) “Desire for sounds: the renunciation of the desire for sounds, refers to musical sounds such as issue from harps, zithers, or flutes, and such as are created by strings, bamboo, metal, or stone, and refers also to such sounds as the voices of men and women singing, chanting, hymning, or reciting.”³⁶
- 3) “Desire for fragrances: the renunciation of the desire for fragrances, refers to the physical scents of men and women, the fragrances of human society’s food, drink and perfumes, as well as all manner of incenses and aromas.”³⁷
- 4) “Desire for flavors: the renunciation of the desire for flavors, refers to bitterness, sourness, sweetness, pungency, saltiness, mildness, and other such fine flavors characteristic of fine beverages and cuisine.”³⁸
- 5) “Desire for touchables: the renunciation of the desire for touchables refers to the softness and delicate slickness of the bodies of men and women, to the sensations of their physical warmth when it is cold, their physical coolness when it is hot, as well as to all other pleasant tactile contacts.”³⁹

³⁵ Zhiyi, *The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight & Dhyana Meditation* written translated by Bhikshu Dharmamitra, p.29.

³⁶ Ibid.,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p.31

³⁹ Ibid.

The purpose of ceasing and contemplation is to achieve detachment from secular life, to reach the pure land and become Buddha. One cannot achieve that by having any foolishness of the five senses mentioned above.

b. Sin of self-hindrances

- 1) 弃「贪欲盖」者：前说外五尘中生五欲，今约内意根生欲。所谓行者，端坐修禅，心生欲觉，念念相续，覆盖善心，令不生长，觉已应弃。

The hindrance of desire: the five desires mentioned above are desires raised in secular life, but now the hindrance refers to the desires which rise from inside. That means meditators cannot practice virtuous deeds if they still have deluded thoughts, defilements. ⁴⁰

- 2) 弃「瞋恚盖」者：瞋是失诸佛法之根本，堕诸恶道之因缘，法乐之怨家，善心之大贼，种种恶口之府藏。

The hindrance of anger: anger is the root of losing pure dharma in world, the main cause of falling into three hell realms, the enemy of dharma joy, thief of good wills and source of foul mouths. ⁴¹

- 3) 弃「睡眠盖」者：内心昏暗，名为睡；五情暗蔽，放恣肢节，委卧睡熟，名为眠。以是因缘，名为睡眠盖。

The hindrance of slumber: the inner conscious falls into darkness, which is called lethargy. The five senses failing and losing control of

⁴⁰ Chih-i, 《天台小止观修订版》，慧辨记录，慧岳注释，1976. p.18.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.19

limbs is called sleep. This is called the hindrance of slumber because meditators cannot practice ceasing and contemplation in such unself-conscious situation. ⁴²

- 4) 弃「掉悔盖」者：掉有三种，一身掉、二口掉、三心掉。身掉者：身好游走，诸杂戏谑，坐不暂安。口掉者：好喜吟咏，诤竞是非，无益戏论，世俗言语等。心掉者：心情放荡，纵意攀缘，思惟文艺，世间才技，诸恶觉观等，名为心掉。

The hindrance of restlessness: there are three kinds of restless. First, a restless body, a restless mouth and a restless mind. A restless body likes to wander around and cannot find comfort while sitting or standing. A restless mouth likes showing off, arguing, making useless comments, and secular words. A restless heart lets thought wander without control, sometimes thinking about literature, art or other talents in the world; sometimes it emits bad thoughts. ⁴³

- 5) 弃「疑盖」者：以疑覆心故，于诸法中，不得信心，信心无故，于佛法中，空无所获。

The hindrance of paranoia: paranoia will hinder the faith in dharma, so even among the dharma the person cannot find faith. Because of lacking faith, one cannot get acquirement in dharma. ⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p.20

⁴³ Ibid., p.21

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.22

c. Sin of avarice, anger, foolishness and arrogance

Chih-I explained in *the Great Contemplation* that one obsessed about the conventional existence of the world falls into the categories of sin designated as avarice, anger, foolishness and arrogance(思假者。谓贪嗔痴慢。).⁴⁵ *Tripitaka Methods* (三藏法数), which compiled interpretations of various terms of the Mahayana Buddhism, finished in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) gave further explanations about these sins:

一贪使引取之心名为贪。谓于一切物及顺情之境。引取无厌。是为贪使。二嗔使忿怒之心名为嗔。谓于一切违情之境。即起忿怒。是为嗔使。三痴使迷惑之心名为痴。谓于一切事理。无所明了。妄生邪见。起诸邪行。是为痴使。四慢使自恃轻他之心名为慢。谓由恃己种姓富贵才能。轻蔑于他。是为慢使。⁴⁶

Translation: First, avarice is the desire of wanting more. The persons who want everything to follow their will and who take things without temperance commit the sin called avarice. Second, anger is the desire that express itself in wrath. One gets angry every time he or she is upset. Third, foolishness involves not knowing the truth but generates distorted views and actions. Fourth, arrogance is thinking one is superior to others because of one's own position, wealth or talents.

3. Religious practice and activity of Tiantai Buddhism

⁴⁵ 智顓,《摩诃止观》第六卷上

⁴⁶ 明沙门释一如等集注, 2013,《新编三藏法数》, p.1257

The Great Calming and Contemplation (Mohe zhiguan) derives from a series of summer lectures of the year 594 A.D. by Chih-i. It was Guanding—a disciple of Chih-i, who took notes on those lectures and later revised and edited them until they reach the text available today.⁴⁷ The whole text of *the Great Calming and Contemplation* includes seven chapters, and the following part will focus on the twenty-five preparatory expedients (二十五方便), four samādhi (四种三昧), and ten modes of contemplation (十境), which are the real instructions to meditation in the book.

a. Twenty-five preparatory expedients⁴⁸

①. the five conditions:

01. keeping the disciplinary code
02. having sufficient clothing and food
03. situating oneself in a quiet place
04. halting one's worldly affairs
05. acquiring worthy friends

②. suppressing the desires for the five objectives of five senses

③. discarding the five hindrances of craving, anger, sleepiness, restlessness and doubt

④. regulating the diet, sleep, body, breath and mind

⑤. the practice of aspiration, exertion, mindfulness, discrimination

(between the lesser joys of the mundane world and the greater joys of samādhi and prajñā) and concentration of mind

⁴⁷ Neal A. Donner, *The Great Calming and Contemplation of Chih-I Chapter One: the Synopsis*, 1976,

⁴⁸ *ibid*

b. Four samādhi

- ① . constantly seated samādhi
- ② . constantly walking samādhi
- ③ . half-walking half-seated samādhi
- ④ . neither walking nor seated samādhi

c. Ten modes of contemplation⁴⁹

- ① . contemplating objects as inconceivable
- ② . arousing compassionate thoughts (bodhi citta)
- ③ . skillful means for easing one's mind
- ④ . the thorough deconstruction of dharmas (frees oneself of all attachments)
- ⑤ . knowing what penetrates and what obstructs the path
- ⑥ . cultivating the steps to the path
- ⑦ . regulating through auxiliary methods
- ⑧ . knowing the stages
- ⑨ . peace through patient recognition
- ⑩ . avoiding passionate attachment to dharmas

d. The meditation-practice

⁴⁹ Fa Qing, *Tiantai Meditation System in Mohe Zhiguan*, International Buddhist College, 2010, page 6

According to Chinese Buddhism scholar Charles Luk (1898-1978), “The right contemplation which consists in looking into all things that have no reality of their own but are creations due to direct and circumstantial causes.”⁵⁰ The “things” mentioned here can be our ideas, e.g., our like and dislikes. As a matter of fact, such ideas can lead to prejudice, which potentially could blind our mind or even bury the seed of sin in minds in the future.

Luk further explains that *zhiguan* (cease and contemplation 止观) can be used to check the sinking and floating mind. “The *zhiguan* method can be practiced either while sitting in meditation, or when involved in causal activities and facing phenomena.”⁵¹

People can practice *zhiguan* method while walking, standing, sitting or even reclining, but sitting position is highly recommended. Usually the beginners’ mind is coarse and unsettled, in this case, they should practice *zhi* method. There are three methods to practice *zhi*:

- 1) Fixing attention on one object, e.g. tip of the nose or on the navel so that minds won’t be wandering.
- 2) Restraining the mind which means subduing the mind when it moves to stop it from wandering. The five sense organs are controlled by the mind; therefore one needs to stop the mind from wandering.
- 3) “Stopping all rising causes to ensure the embodiment of (absolute) reality by realizing that all things (dharma) arise from the mind, due to direct and

⁵⁰Luk, Charles (1964), *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation*, Rider Press. p.131

⁵¹Ibid., p.129

circumstantial causes, and are devoid of any nature of their own.”⁵²

When a person sits in meditation, one’s mind may be dull or blocked; obscure or torpid, drowsy. In this case, people should practice *guan* method to adjust their sinking minds and awaken it. The two methods to practice *guan*:

1) Contemplation of the opposite, for example, of filthiness [of human flesh such as odor and waste] to eliminate [unjustified] desire and love; of a compassionate mind (heart) to eliminate anger and resentment and of counted breaths to end the drifting thoughts. These all exclude discrimination.⁵³

2) “The right contemplation which consists in looking into all things that have no reality of their own but are creations due to direct and circumstantial causes. Since causes also have no nature, they are identical with the (underlying) reality (from which they arise.) As the objects thus contemplated are unreal, it follows that the mind which contemplates them will cease to arise.”⁵⁴

Here “all things that have no reality of their own but are creations” is what mentioned as Tiantai philosophy earlier in this paper, which is also part of the threefold truth: “all things or *dharma*s are empty because they are produced through causes and conditions and therefore have no self-nature, but they do have tentative or provisional existence.”⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., p.129-130

⁵³ Ibid.,

⁵⁴ Ibid.,

⁵⁵ Chan, Wing-tsit, et al. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600*. Edited by Wm. Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., Columbia University Press, 1999. p. 444

B. Sin and religious practice in medieval Christianity/Catholicism

1. Brief introduction of Christian moral philosophy/theology

Christian theology is a huge topic that is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, it is going to focus on the discussion of original sin and the sin of pride, greed and lust among the cardinal sins.

a. Original sin

The doctrine of original sin (ancestral sin) is derived from the story of Adam and Eve's rebellion in the garden of Eden—eating the forbidden fruit after being seduced by the serpent from the *Bible*, Book of Genesis chapter 3. It is worth noting that in Genesis chapters 2 to 3, neither the word “sin” nor the concept of “original sin” is used in the story or anywhere in the Jewish Bible. The narrative form of crime and punishment is told in two parts: the transgression and the punishment.⁵⁶

As quoted by John Toews, professor of Old Testament Mark Biddle believes the transgression is when Adam and Eve made a judgement about God and chose to mistrust God and God's words to achieve the autonomy that would make them wise. Such behavior resulted in disobedience of God's words.⁵⁷ For the first time in Christian thought, Augustine of Hippo uses the epoch-making phrase “Original sin” (*Originale peccatum*) in his book *First Question: Romans*.⁵⁸

The Catechism of Catholic Church records that everyone has original sin, but this is not the feature of a personal fault but is attributed as Adam's descendants. “It is a

⁵⁶ Toews, John E. *The Story of Original Sin*. Casemate Publishers and Book Distributors, LLC, 2013. p.4

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called ‘concupiscence’.”⁵⁹

Original sin is not an evil crime committed before the birth of a human being but the separation from holiness, like the rebellion of children disobeying their parents and instead following their own rules. A similar context of discussion of original sin is that Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden was the violation of the law.⁶⁰

St. Augustine in mid-390s and early 400s asserted that “God imputes the sin of Adam immediately to all his posterity, in virtue of that organic unity of mankind by which the whole race at the time of Adam’s transgression existed, not individually, but seminally, in him as its head. The total life of humanity was then in Adam: the race yet had its being only in him. In Adam’s free act, the will of the race revolted from God and the nature of the race was wounded.”⁶¹

b. Cardinal vices

In Christian tradition, the idea of vice is of monastic origin before it was applied to the faithful life of the lay community. The names and number of vices are varied according to different authors. However, the constants outnumber the differences.⁶²

According to modern scholar Scott Sullender, Christian writers were attempting to

⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part I*, 1994 p.405

⁶⁰ Strong, Augustus H. *Systematic Theology*. Philadelphia: Judson, 1907. p.533f.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, P.619

⁶² Aimé Solignac, “Péchés capitaux,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1983) volume 12/1 column 853-63. Translation of historical parts by L.E. Frizzell

classify the vices since 2nd and 3rd centuries C.E. The list grew out of the lived experience of the Christian community and it was used as spiritual direction to guide priests to understand God's will and human nature and help the faithful. Regardless of the variety and gravity of sins, Christian authors came to believe that the seven were the worst and the root of others: pride, greed, envy, wrath, sloth, gluttony, and lust, which are now referred to as the Seven Deadly Sins.⁶³

This paper will mainly talk about the vice of pride, greed and lust among the seven deadly sins to give a detailed context for later comparison between the two religions.

1) Vice of pride

Some say that the sin of pride is the root of all evils, which is plausible in the context of the *Bible*, according to book of Ecclesiastes 10:12, "The beginning of pride is when one departeth from God, and his heart is turned away from his Maker." And this leads theologians to consider the first sin: the story in the book of Genesis about Adam and Eve's feeling ashamed and hiding from God in the Garden of Eden after they ate the forbidden fruit.⁶⁴

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) thinks that pride is the commencement of all sin:

"because it was this which overthrew the devil, from whom arose the origin of sin; and afterwards, when his malice and envy pursued man, who was yet standing in his uprightness, it subverted him in the same way in

⁶³ Scott Sullender, 2014, The Seven Deadly Sins as a Pastoral Diagnostic System *Pastoral Psychol* (2015) 64:217-227

⁶⁴ *Bible*, Ecclesiastes 10:12, Genesis 3:8, KJV version

which he himself fell. For the serpent, in fact, only sought for the door of pride whereby to enter when he said, ‘Ye shall be as gods.’”⁶⁵

Bishop Fulton Sheen, when he was professor at the Catholic University of America, stated that “pride is an inordinate love of one’s own excellence, either of body or mind or the unlawful pleasure we derive from thinking we have no superiors.”⁶⁶ Then he further explains that pride comes in many forms: atheism—denial of dependence on God; intellectual vanity—people thinking they already know everything that one needs to know; superficiality—judging others by their external conditions; snobbery—sneering at inferiors to show superiority; presumptuousness—seeking honors and position beyond one’s capacity; exaggerated sensitiveness—incapable of moral improvement because of not being willing to hear one’s own faults and vain-glory. ⁶⁷

2) Vice of greed

Saint Augustine gave a detailed explanation of the vice of greed.

“Greed is not a defect in the gold that is desired but in the man who loves it perversely by falling from justice which he ought to esteem as incomparably superior to gold; nor is lust a defect in bodies which are beautiful and pleasing: it is a sin in the soul of the one who loves corporal pleasures perversely, that is, by abandoning that temperance which joins us in spiritual and unblemishable union with realities far more beautiful and pleasing; nor is boastfulness a blemish in words of praise: it is a failing in the soul of one who is so perversely in love with other peoples' applause that he despises the voice of his own conscience; nor is pride a vice in the one who delegates power, still less a flaw in the power itself: it is a passion in the soul of the one who loves his own power so perversely as to condemn the authority of one who is still more powerful. In a word, anyone who loves perversely the good of any nature whatsoever and even, perhaps acquires this

⁶⁵ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Anti-Pelagian Writings*, translated by Benjamin B. Warfield, Robert Ernest Wallis, Peter Holmes, printed by Createspace. p.188

⁶⁶ Fulton J. Sheen, 1939, *The Seven Capital Sins*, Alba House, 2001 p37

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p38

good makes himself bad by gaining something good and sad by losing something better.”⁶⁸

This indicates that the sin of greed is a vice that lures people into losing themselves in their own desires, which results in losing virtues accordingly.

Lawrence Cunningham, O'Brien Emeritus Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, points out that in Ten Commandments the first three dealt with human's relation with God. The other seven dealt with human relations with each other. Of those, the last two on not coveting another person's wife or goods stand out from the rest of those treating human relationships with each other. This is because they are the only commandments that prohibit inner the inclination rather than the act and though “coveting” seems like an innocent envy, but it is action in rehearsal.⁶⁹

American philosopher James Ogilvy thinks that “greed is first among the seven deadliest.” For reasons that “greed turns love into lust, leisure into sloth, hunger into gluttony, honor into pride, righteous indignation into anger, and admiration into envy.”⁷⁰

The category of greed not only applies to the action of getting more than one needs, like over eating or excessive drinking, but also in people's psychological activity to want more than they deserve. Even if a man does not have any money in his pocket, this does not mean that this person is less covetous than others; he may be involuntarily poor but with a great passion in others' fortune.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, An Image Book Doubleday Press. p.235

⁶⁹ Lawrence S. Cunningham, 2012, *The Seven Deadly Sins: a visitor's guide*, Ave Maria Press, p.33-34

⁷⁰ Robert C. Solomon (editor), *Wicked Pleasure: Meditations on the Seven “Deadly” Sins*, Rowman & Littlefield p.87

⁷¹ Fulton J. Sheen, 1939, *The Seven Capital Sins*, Alba House, 2001 p.82

3) Vice of lust

Cunningham points out that St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) discussed lust in nineteen various places in the *Summa Theologiae*. He summarizes Aquinas's idea that lust begins in "looking", next mulling over, enjoyment, internal consent and finally, the action. Cunningham thinks that lust is not distinguished exactly as Aquinas suggested, but first lust is internal and erupts into lustful activity when occasion affords.⁷² Cunningham thinks that the Christian moralists tend to think of lust as reflecting animal instincts. And he argues that this sin is viewed as least sinful among the cardinal vices. For "Jesus is less condemnatory relative to public sinners, such as prostitutes, than he is with religious hypocrites." Besides, it is "a twisting of a base instinct, and typically free of the cold intellectual calculation of other sins."⁷³

On the other hand, Catholic priest Joseph Francis Delany (1866-20th century) thinks that lust is a capital sin because its object is so attractive that it meets a man's desire and leads him into committing many other disorders during the pursuit of it. Theologians distinguish different forms of lust as a completely external sin, such as adultery and abduction.⁷⁴ Sullender gives a vivid example to understand the cardinal vices. The capital sins are seven trees. "The trunk of one tree is lust, and the branches that spring forth on the trunk are the various sinful manifestations of lust, i.e., adultery, fornication..."⁷⁵

To recognize these cardinal vices is a major step in the process knowing oneself

⁷² Lawrence S. Cunningham, 2012, *The Seven Deadly Sins: a Visitor's Guide*, Ave Maria, p.26

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.25

⁷⁴ Joseph Francis Delany, 1913, *Lust*, *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913), Vol.9

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Lust](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Lust)

⁷⁵ Scott Sullender, 2014, *The Seven Deadly Sins as a Pastoral Diagnostic System* Pastoral Psychol (2015)

and in recognizing the need for redemption. In many cases, people must be tormented by their own vices and want to change before they seek help from outside. And understanding their own vices could be the first step in the process of reforming their lives.

2. Pope Gregory I's teaching on sin

Recent scholars have made exciting discoveries of Pope Gregory I's teaching about sin. Most of them came from *Morals on Job* and other works summarized and organized by Gregory. The focus on evil in Gregory's teaching will focus on three topics: evil in disguise, ignorance and new classification of vice.

a. Evil in disguise

As modern scholar G. R. Evans explains, Gregory sums up the essence of Augustine's thought that good men love the truth. Thus, they want their thoughts and actions to coordinate with God's truth. However, good men do not present themselves as they really are for their goodness is God's gift, and they do not want to take the credit falsely.⁷⁶

In contrast with that, evil is always full of kinks and deceptions, just like vices themselves pretend to be virtues. Thus, wicked men live with a deceiving appearance. In addition, it makes a person defensive in correcting his or her reputation when the person sees the carefully constructed edifice of disguise threatened by a deep search

⁷⁶ G. R. Evans, 1986, *The Thought of Gregory the Great*, Cambridge University Press 1988 p.71-72

within. These wicked men are not Gregory's concern in preaching, but an example for people who are striving to be good to see what they must avoid. Good men are made happy by the good they do to their fellow-creatures rather than for themselves.⁷⁷

Therefore, when good men are in authoritative positions, they do not take pleasure in overpowering their fellow-creatures but to see themselves as shepherds to flocks. This is the way Gregory conceived that a good ruler will govern. This is how good men remain close to the sacred when contacting with the world and living among wicked men but still hold onto their goodness.⁷⁸

b. Ignorance

Gregory considered ignorance as one of the factors that distinguishes people in the secular life and in the after life in heaven. "Our peace begins in longing for the Creator, but it is perfected by the clear vision [of him.] Indeed, it will then be perfect when the mind is not blinded by ignorance."⁷⁹ Gregory also said that the saints "are not ignorant, either of God's will, or of those things which shall be." However, the idea that people's ignorance will vanish when they reach heaven was not given further statement by Gregory.⁸⁰ In this context, ignorance includes two parts. One is not knowing God's will, the other one is not seeing things as they should be. The late theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1915-1966) responded to this situation with the serenity prayer, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change/ the courage to

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.72

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.72-73

⁷⁹ Joseph P. Mcclain, 1956, Rev..*The Doctrine of Heaven in the Writings of Saint Gregory the Great*, The Catholic University of America Press. p.56

⁸⁰ Ibid.,

change the things I can/ and the wisdom to know the difference...Trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with you forever in the next.”⁸¹

c. New classification of vice

The French theologian Aimé Solignac thinks that under Augustine’s influence, Gregory the Great introduced a new classification of vice. “He set pride apart as the root of all evil and made the seven main vices as its offspring.” He next adds that Gregory suppressed *acedia* (sloth) and integrated its effect with *tristitia* (sadness) and in its place he introduced envy, which St. Augustine linked closely with pride. Finally, Gregory modified John Cassian’s order of the eight general “thoughts”—gluttony, fornication, avarice, *tristitia* (sadness), anger, *acedia* (sloth), vain glory and pride. He began with such subtle moral vices because he was addressing to common people instead of a monastic community. In the end, Solignac concludes that Gregory’s classification was popular in the West throughout the Middle Ages. Later Ambrose Autpert (died 784) was inspired by it that he pointed out each of the principal and secondary vices is opposed to its contrary virtue.⁸²

3. Religious practice and activity of Christianity

a. Baptism

⁸¹ Lawrence S. Cunningham, 2012, *The Seven Deadly Sins: a visitor’s guide*, Ave Maria Press, p.31

⁸² Aimé Solignac, “Péchés capitaux,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1983) volumes 12/1 column 853-63. Translation of historical parts by L.E. Frizzell

Baptism is the fundamental experience in Christianity. “The rite of admission into the Christian church, practiced by all denominations. Its origin is probably to be sought in (i) the Jewish practice of baptizing proselytes; and (ii) the baptism administered by John the Baptist of the forgiveness of sins.”⁸³ In the Gospel (Mark 1:2-8), John is the messenger from God who baptized people with water, to help people prepare their way for letting God into their lives, so that later God can baptize them in the Holy Spirit.⁸⁴

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, the doctrine of attending baptism in the early church was variable. For example, it might be washing away of sins, a dying with Christ, a rebirth or the gift of the Holy Spirit. The baptism theology gained precision in the 3rd and 4th century, especially in St. Augustine’s writings. Infant baptism became the norm, after the conversion of many adults in earlier centuries, together with the theology of original sin. Therefore, the earlier common practice of baptism on one’s deathbed was replaced by infant baptism.⁸⁵

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gave its definition of baptism as the sacrament of regeneration by water in the word. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) thought that “baptism is the external ablution of the body, performed with the prescribed form of words.” The term of “regeneration” distinguishes baptism from every other sacrament, because although penance revivifies men spiritually, but this is rather a resuscitation—a bringing back from the dead, than a rebirth. Penance does not make

⁸³ Bowker, John (1999). *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford University Press. p. 125.

⁸⁴ *Bible*, Book of Mark 1:2-8 KJV version

⁸⁵ Bowker, John (1999). *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford University Press. p. 125.

people Christians; on the contrary, it presumes that people have already been born of water and the Holy Spirit to the life of grace. On the other hand, baptism was instituted to confer upon men the very beginnings of the spiritual life, to transfer people from the state of enemies of God to the state of adoption, as children of God.⁸⁶

b. Contemplation

The Benedictine medieval scholar Jean Leclercq comments that the novelty Gregory brought to contemplative prayer in medieval western Christianity is his religious experience, which itself reflects his character and life circumstances. Gregory carefully analyzed states of soul that he experienced without always describing them precisely. He understood human misery from his own infirmities, which not only resulted from original sin but also the weakness and temptation in the context of spiritual progress.⁸⁷ This leads to questions like: what is contemplative prayer and how does it relate to contemplation? Dom Cuthbert Butler (1858-1934), a Benedictine monk from England, clarified that by quoting John Cassian's (360-435) teaching: contemplative prayer is "the kind of prayer in which or by which contemplation is exercised. It has to be clearly asserted, in the first place, that vocal prayer may be contemplative, and this whether it be private vocal prayer or the public prayer of the Divine Office."⁸⁸ He further explained it by quoting from French scholar Père Ludovic de Besse (1831-1910),

⁸⁶ G. Roger Hudleston, Charles G. Herbermann (ed.) 1909, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol.II, Robert Appleton Company, p. 250

⁸⁷ Jean Leclercq. "Contemplation Occidentale," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953) 2/2 column 1933. Translation by L.E. Frizzell

⁸⁸ Dom Cuthbert Butler, 1922, *Western Mysticism*, Harper & Row press, p.217

Meditation carefully practiced leads on to affective prayer. This in its turn leads just as surely to the 'prayer of faith'. The grace of prayer generally terminates here, for it has reached the degree of ordinary perfection. Beyond that point prayer becomes extraordinary. When a soul is drawn to the prayer of faith, the Holy Spirit inspires no special idea in the intellect and excites no emotion in the senses. He goes directly to the will and attracts it, revealing His presence to the soul by the light of faith directed towards the highest point of the intelligence, without stirring up the imagination or the lower faculties. Feeling itself thus near to God, the will keenly perceives the need of loving Him, and of entire self-abandonment into His hands.⁸⁹

Butler concludes that there are several steps before contemplation. There is remote preparation which involves purification and proximate preparation—recollection, introversion in the preliminary phases. He indicates that Gregory agreed with Augustine's idea that the remote preparation and condition for the task is exercising self-discipline, self-control, self-denial and practicing virtues; this is Christian asceticism—a course of training in the spiritual life. Besides, for St. Gregory, purification in this phase is the first stage in the spiritual life, which order is: mortification, active good works and finally contemplation.⁹⁰

Furthermore, Gregory brought different content in relation to the aspect of self-observing. St. Gregory divided the proximate preparation stage for contemplation into two parts: recollection and introversion. Recollection means that mind recollects itself; "gather itself to itself (*se ad se colligit*).” Introversion as the second step is that "it should see itself as it is when recollected.” This means that one should "turn its eyes inwards upon itself and consider itself thus stripped of sense perceptions and free from bodily images. In this way the soul 'makes of itself a ladder for itself' (*sibi de*

⁸⁹ Dom Cuthbert Butler, 1922, *Western Mysticism*, Harper & Row Press, p.xvi

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.68

seipsa gradus ascensionis facit).”⁹¹ Butler’s summary of the St. Gregory’s division is that the “striking passage of the kind have been adduced from St Augustine, wherein is described under the act of introversion the soul’s search to find God within itself, a search which for St. Augustine appears to have been a process predominantly intellectual but culminating in a fully religious experience.”⁹²

Additionally, Butler extracts St. Gregory’s idea that there are two lives in which God instructs people with His holy word: the active life—such as giving bread to the hungry, teaching the ignorant the word of wisdom and tending the sick, and the contemplative life—such as retaining indeed with all one’s mind the love of God and neighbor, but to rest from exterior action and cleaving only to the desire for the Maker.⁹³

As for the relation between the two lives, Gregory used the story of two wives which is from the *Bible*, Genesis 29:15-30. Jacob had two wives, Lia symbolizes the laborious active life and Rachel symbolizes the contemplative life, which is single-minded, only longs for the sight of God. Holy Jacob desired Rachel but received Lia on the wedding night. Because Rachel was beautiful but sterile, this is like the contemplative life; it is lovely in the mind but it does not give heir by preaching; it is less involved in gathering people while it pursues quiet. On the other hand, Lia was dim-eyed but fertile; for one sees less when being occupied by work. Butler also summarized Augustine’s and Gregory’s axiom that active is necessary because no one

⁹¹ Ibid., p.69

⁹² Ibid.,

⁹³ Dom Cuthbert Butler, 1922, *Western Mysticism*, Harper & Row Press, p.171-172

can come to contemplation without exercising the works of the active life.

IV. Analysis and comparison

A. Evil, vice and sin

To begin with, it is necessary to clarify the terms in the two religions. When talking about sin, it is common to see it is parallel with the words for vice and evil. In Christianity, French priest Aimé Solignac (1917-2007) explains that the capital sins are not sin as this word itself implies, meaning a conscious and voluntary action, but are tendencies that lead to evil. It was first called “thoughts in the pejorative meaning of *logismos* (thought), equivalent of *yeşer hara’* (the evil inclination) of Judaism, ‘spirits’ of demonic origin, or simply ‘vices’.”⁹⁴ The term ‘sins’ prevailed by the 13th century because these tendencies most often find fulfillment in habits that are not without more or less conscious guilt and because they lead to really sinful acts. Then he further points out that it was “Evagrius Ponticus (346-399) who suggested this point and Hugh of St. Victor (died 1142) made the decisive precisions.”⁹⁵

When it comes to Chinese Buddhism, this stimulates a question. Is there the actual concept of sin in Chinese Buddhism? Barbara O’Brien says, “Buddhism has no concept of sin; therefore, redemption and forgiveness in the Christian sense are meaningless in Buddhism.”⁹⁶ Then, she uses the standard definition for sin such as “estrangement from God, an act that is regarded by theologians as a transgression of

⁹⁴ Aimé Solignac, “Péchés capitaux,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1983) volumes 12/1 column 853-63. Translation of historical parts by L.E. Frizzell

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ O'Brien, Barbara. "Sins and Buddhism." Thought Co, Oct. 29, 2014, thoughtco.com/sins-and-buddhism-3976932.

God's will and violate a law of God or a moral law”⁹⁷ to categorize the concept of sin.

Then she continues to argue that “the precepts are not approached as laws but as disciplines for training.”⁹⁸

Before answering that question, the background information is that in Buddhism there is also a doctrine of heaven and hell. However, the name is slightly different. Heaven is called “Pure Land(极乐世界)”, where people can be with Buddha forever. As for hell, in *Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Fundamental Vow Sutra* (地藏菩萨本愿经), the ghost king named No Poison (*Vandana* 无毒) replied to holy woman that “since people did not perform many virtuous deeds while alive, their negative karma is guiding them into the various hells.”⁹⁹ There is large content in this sutra that vividly describes the numerous hells and in great details how people suffer there. Different evil deeds attract people to various hells. It gave further explanation to the power of evil deeds.

业力甚大，能敌须弥，能深巨海，能障圣道。¹⁰⁰

The power of the sentient beings' negative karma is truly enormous. It rivals the size of Mount Sumeru. It can encompass the great ocean. It can even obstruct the paths to liberation.¹⁰¹

In this case, the negative karma indicates the results of wrongdoings. In other words, it is the wrongdoings that barricade the path to salvation. The example would

⁹⁷ Ibid.,

⁹⁸ Ibid.,

⁹⁹ *Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Fundamental Vow Sutra*, translated by Tripitaka Shikshananda, Johnny Yu 2005 http://www.buddhism.org/Sutras/2/ksitigarbha_sutra.htm

¹⁰⁰ 《地藏菩萨本愿经》，实叉难陀译，第 13 卷

¹⁰¹ *Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Fundamental Vow Sutra*, translated by Tripitaka Shikshananda, Johnny Yu 2005 http://www.buddhism.org/Sutras/2/ksitigarbha_sutra.htm

be a thief being imprisoned. The result of the thief being in prison is not just because there is a law prohibits people from stealing, more importantly, it is that person's actual action that leads to his or her imprisonment. Thus, the answer is that the concept of sin in Chinese Buddhism does exist; however, it is less obvious when compared to Catholicism.

Doctor Neal A. Donner from the University of British Columbia defines evil "as the opposite of the Six Perfections: avarice, immorality, anger, laziness, mental distraction, and stupidity [foolishness]." The Six Perfections include giving, morality, forbearance, exertion, meditation, wisdom. Then he further points out that "stupidity [foolishness] on the Buddhist side, and pride and envy on the Christian side" should not correspond.¹⁰² In order to reach an interreligious dialogue, this paper counts the factors that impede humans' path to salvation to be sin.

B. Sin from outside and inside

Tiantai Buddhism points out sins that prevent people from reaching pure land come from sources of outside and inside. Five desires come from five senses: eyes, ears, tongue, smell and body touch. What comes from inside are five hindrances: desire, anger, slumber, restlessness and paranoia. Besides, arrogance and foolishness are also considered to be sins. The purpose of pointing this out is to spot and observe these sins when the mind or body is inclining towards one of them, or even committing the given sin. Then the wisdom of contemplation is granted to help people

¹⁰² Neal A. Donner, *Chih-i's Meditation on Evil*, <http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-BJ010/bj01020832.pdf>

to free themselves from sins and to reach salvation.

For Chih-i the five senses and five hinderances are necessary in the preparation stage for contemplation. The importance of the five senses was also supported by Gregory. As Butler quotes in *Homilies on Ezechiel* (II.V.) St. Gregory agreed that the preparation to achieve control of five senses is crucial in the process of spiritual training: “It [Preparation] must first have learned to shut out from its eyes all the phantasmata of earthly and heavenly images, and to spurn and tread underfoot whatever presents itself to its thought from sight, from hearing, from smell, from bodily touch or taste, so that it may seek itself interiorly as it is without these sensations.”¹⁰³ This matches Chih-i’s teaching about sins coming from outside world—the five desires.

C. Differences in cardinal sins

Apart from the sins coming from outside, vices like pride and greed are from inside. The significant difference between the sin of pride in Buddhism and Christianity is that, according to Augustine, pride is the source of all evil and it not only means superiority over others like the teaching of Tiantai Buddhism, but also points to a human being trying to be like God instead of humbling oneself in front of the higher Power. The idea about sin of greed is not completely different in two religions. Tiantai Buddhism treats the five desires as a dangerous path towards hell; thus, people should keep away from their influence. For avarice is the desire of

¹⁰³ Dom Cuthbert Butler, 1922, *Western Mysticism*, Harper Torch Books New 1926, p.69

wanting more without the limits set by temperance. It is not restricted to the material world, it also could be the desire of a person forcing the world around him or her to follow his or her will.

Likewise, the sin of greed for Christianity is that people lose themselves in selfish desires but neglect the spiritual realm. Tiantai Buddhism puts the sin of lust into the category that expresses desires of sounds, forms, fragrances and touchables, which are sins from outside, and preach that people must avoid such kinds of sin in the early stage before one gets intrigued by continuing evil thoughts.

On the contrary, Catholicism gives the sin of lust a detailed classification. It sees the actual action of committing the sin of lust as an external sin. Meanwhile, the evil thoughts in mind about the sin of lust are treated as internal. Such difference is made to teach people that one should not only mind their actions, but more importantly, to be cautious about controlling their thoughts.

Furthermore, in Catholicism, “sloth is a malady of the will which cause us to neglect our duties.”¹⁰⁴ It can be physical and spiritual. It is physical when it shows itself in laziness, procrastination, idleness, softness, indifference. It is spiritual, when it was shown as indifference to personality betterment, a distaste for the spiritual, a tepidness or failure to cultivate new virtue.¹⁰⁵

Also, in Tiantai Buddhism lists the sin of sloth in one of its physical forms—the hindrance of slumber. There are two sins that might lead to sin of sloth. The sin of foolishness (generating distorted views because of not knowing the truth) can make

¹⁰⁴ Fulton J. Sheen, 1939, *The Seven Capital Sins*, Alba House, 2001 p.37

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.37-38

people think that they are correct and thus do not require further efforts in lives.

Furthermore, sin of arrogance (thinking one is superior to others) can also lead to the sin of sloth.

D. Contemplation

Butler shows Gregory's attitude that the union of active life and contemplative life aims specifically to instruct those who are training to be preachers. Besides, good preachers should neither wholly leave one life for the other. All pastors of souls and superiors must exercise both lives. "The ruler (he who has the cure of souls) should be close to all by compassion but hung above all by contemplation."¹⁰⁶ Therefore, he can take the weakness of others unto himself by the kindness inside of him. And he may transcend himself in seeking things invisible by the loftiness of speculation. In this case, he will not either despise the weakness of his neighbors by seeking the heights, nor give up climbing the heights by adapting himself to their infirmities.¹⁰⁷ The teaching of contemplation in medieval Catholicism gave a sophisticated guide to the priest or pastor in contemplative life and gave instructions about how to balance it with the active life.

As for the aspect of contemplation itself, the experience of contemplation in both religions are private and secluded. They both call attention to the compassionate heart to care for others around us. Tiantai Buddhism targets its message to everyone who wants to practice contemplation. Emphasizing it as a way of self-cultivation, the

¹⁰⁶ Dom Cuthbert Butler, 1922, *Western Mysticism*, Harper Torch Books New Press 1926, p.177

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,

message encourages people to practice contemplation throughout their daily lives.

Surprisingly, the lives of preachers suggested by Gregory happen to coincide with the theory of Threefold Truth in Tiantai Buddhism. The active life and contemplative life correspond with the worldly truth and sacred truth. But it is not enough to answer all the questions. Therefore, there is a “Middle Path” that includes God’s truth and secular truth.

In Catholicism, contemplative prayer is the process of being together with God when one is alone and in a quiet place. The idea of finding God within oneself is not totally different from the idea of nature of Buddha in the Northern and Southern dynasties. Modern Chinese scholar Wang Zhimei quotes that after the popularity of *Nirvana Sutra* (涅槃经) in China, the Buddha nature came under the spotlight. It means that every sentient being can reach the ultimate truth (Nivarna).¹⁰⁸

The comparison about this topic is that firstly, in Christianity, only the human being can reach the truth; to contemplate and thus find God within itself. In Tiantai Buddhism all sentient beings have the possibility to reach salvation. Next, Chih-i also pointed out that Buddha nature also contains evil, which shapes the uniqueness of Tiantai Buddhism. He thinks that distress leads to enlightenment, reaching Nivarna is to surpass life and death (烦恼即菩提，生死即涅槃。).¹⁰⁹ To observe and overcome greed is to reach Bodhi (贪欲即是道。).¹¹⁰ Māra is the mother of Buddha (魔怨是佛母。).¹¹¹ The story behind this is that Māra the demon is afraid that Prince

¹⁰⁸ 王志楣，2012，《智顓与吉藏佛性论之思维方式比较》，*Philosophical Analysis*, Vol.3 No.4 2012

¹⁰⁹ 智顓，《妙法莲华经玄义》卷 33

¹¹⁰ 智顓，《摩诃止观》卷二，大正藏 46 卷，第 18 页

¹¹¹ 智顓，《观心论》大正藏 46 卷，第 587 页

Siddhartha (Gautama Buddha, 563-483 BCE) is going to reach enlightenment. Then the demon sent beautiful women to seduce him and even threatened to kill him. However, all these sufferings are like the dirty mud that nurtured the lotus. Prince Siddhartha reached Nivarna in the end.

Such an idea is subtly supported by the questions that follow. “If a man is not grieved there (in heaven) by any memory of his past sins, how does he rejoice in himself at having been freed therefrom? ... And if he does not remember the past miseries, whence does he bestow praise for the mercies showed upon him?”¹¹²

Gregory answered that people often recall sad things when they are happy such as when being in good health without pain, we remember past pains. Thus, there will be memory of past sin, not such as taint the mind, but this brings us closer to joy. Like a patient remembering the physical pain but without the feeling of pain will cherish health more and knows more that he or she has escaped evil.¹¹³

V. Conclusion

This paper first introduced the life of Great Master Chih-i (Zhiyi) in Tiantai Buddhism and Pope Gregory the Great from Rome in Medieval Catholicism. After the brief overview of Tiantai philosophy on Threefold truth, it presented the teaching of Chih-i about sin—the sin of five senses and five hindrances in the text of *The Essentials for Practicing Calming-and-Insight & Dhyana Meditation (Xiao Zhiguan)*.

¹¹² Joseph P. McClain, Rev. 1956, *The Doctrine of Heaven in the Writings of Saint Gregory the Great*, The Catholic University of America Press. p.62

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p.62-63

The study presented the religious practice of contemplation in Tiantai Buddhism, the core of which is based on the *zhiguan* method. The purpose is to eliminate discrimination by the practice of contemplation.

Then it introduced the Christian moral theology of medieval era with the focus on pride, greed and lust among the seven cardinal sins. This paper further demonstrated the scholarship on theology of Gregory the Great about the topic of sin. The highlight includes the evil in disguise, ignorance and new classification of sin. Next, it displayed the religious practice of baptism and contemplation in medieval Catholicism. The practice of baptism was given a new meaning of regeneration and form during 3rd and 4th century. Pope Gregory I pointed out that for pastors the contemplative life is crucial and should not be separated from the active life.

For the part of analysis and comparison, this paper concludes that Buddhism also has the concept of sin, and it puts emphasis on the teaching that all are responsible for their own actions. However, there is a difference regarding the cardinal sins in two religions. The sin of pride not only means the word arrogance itself, but also in medieval Catholicism the attitude of not humbling themselves before God. In Buddhism and Christianity, the sin of greed also indicates the avarice for money or other materials in life, yet in Tiantai Buddhism it also counts as sin when people are forcing the world around them to follow their wills. Lust is considered to be sin in both religions. The difference is that Tiantai Buddhism counts it in the category sin from five senses, and thus people should cut the source in the beginning. While in medieval Catholicism, the sin of lust is seen in the aspect of its form: internal and

external—in one's mind and action.

Chih-i and Gregory the Great both agree that the sin of five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) are sins from outside that people should avoid at the preliminary stage of contemplation and the great compassion is crucial for contemplation. Contemplation in Tiantai Buddhism encourages everyone to practice the contemplative life to eliminate discrimination. And Christianity ask its pastors to balance the contemplative life and active life—search for God within themselves and serve the community with kindness.

Doubtlessly, there are differences between the two religions, yet there are more resemblances than it appears. For example, Scott Sullender presented one patient who suffers from depression. Her therapist revealed that she spends a lot of time in sessions being self-evaluative, constantly scanning her peers and measuring herself in many ways. Sullender thinks sin of envy accounts for her action of constantly competing with others.¹¹⁴ If this patient realizes her problem and follows the preaching of Tiantai Buddhism, she would understand that the material things are empty because they only have tentative existence. Therefore, there is no need to compare herself with her peers.

Finally, this paper hopes to help people from different religious backgrounds to understand each other by comparison. And it calls for readers to set aside prejudice and see the possibility of people from different religious backgrounds cooperating to help humankind reach salvation.

¹¹⁴ Scott Sullender, 2014, *The Seven Deadly Sins as a Pastoral Diagnostic System* Pastoral Psychol (2015) p.226

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