

# Practice, Not Dogma Tzu-chi and the Buddhist Tradition

## 實踐，而非教條——慈濟與傳統佛教

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The Buddhist tradition carries with it an enormous treasure house of teachings. The quantity of words in the sutras exceeds the Christian Bible and Patristic writings. Scholars like myself love words. Our instinct and inclination is to focus on the words and organize them systematically into theories. But in understanding religions this may be misleading. Before any theories come stories of actions. The ideas that religions teach are mainly ways of explaining such actions. The Buddha witnesses the inevitability of suffering, leaves his kingdom, goes into the forest, joins a group of ascetics but then seeks a middle way, sits under a Bodhi tree and reaches enlightenment. This story of action and its cosmic implications are eventually explained by sutras. Among the many schools of Buddhism there have long been debates about the relative importance of studying doctrines and performing practices. But actions always carry a surplus of meanings that can never be fully captured by any set of words. From the point of view of a scholar of comparative religion, I would argue, practices are the most important. Scholars as well as followers of religions should always be ready to move beyond doctrines to consider the practices that underpin religious life.

A general characteristic of Buddhist practices is that they are open-ended, constantly open to revision through skillful means in the light of new circumstances. A dominant metaphor is that of a “path.” One starts out on a path and strives to stick with it despite adversity but one can never fully know at the beginning where the path will lead. The main path in the Mahayana tradition was, of course, the bodhisattva path, whose main practice was boundless compassion. The practice of such compassion is not simply a means to some end. The practices of compassion are aimed at alleviating the suffering of sentient beings, but the practices are also ends in themselves. They are not defined simply in terms of their success in efficiently alleviating suffering. Even if one tries but fails with good intention to alleviate someone’s suffering, the act of compassion is still good, an expression of the Buddha nature embedded in all of us. The practices of compassion are a kind of ritual: expressive as well as utilitarian. The practices of compassion are also without boundaries. A bodhisattva can never limit compassion and will always seek new ways to practice it under the changing circumstances of the world.

One part of the bodhisattva path leads to Tzu-chi. One of Master Cheng Yen's most notable sayings is: "Just do it!" Do not intellectualize. Act. In the library of Tzu-chi's headquarters is a large room full of binders documenting all of the works of compassion that Tzu-chi members have carried out. "These," said the person who showed me this room, "are our sutras."

The practice of compassion fostered through Tzu-chi follows the Buddhist tradition but in a modern way. The modernity is in line with the twentieth century reforms of Taixu and Yinxun with creative extension and adaptation by Cheng Yen. The modernity is evident in a kind of purification and professionalization of compassionate practice. By late imperial China, Buddhist practices had become mixed up with the utilitarian economic, social, and political practices of ordinary life. Buddhist rituals were often simply a means of raising money. Acts of helping others in the name of compassion were often just a means for gaining social status. Buddhist practices, even if carried out with little or no interior compassion, were often seen as a means to automatically acquire merit. In the minds of social and political reformers, Buddhists often acquired the reputation of being ignorant and even immoral.

The efforts of reformers like Taixu were to purify Buddhist practices by separating them from worldly motives of greed, delusion, and hatred. This meant refocusing on the specifically Buddhist character of the practices – differentiating Buddhism from normal economic and political activity. But having achieved (at least partially) such differentiation Buddhism should re-enter the world, strive to heal the wounds caused by greed, hatred, and delusion, and by eliciting everyone's Buddha nature, make this world into a loving, caring pureland. Master Cheng Yen, as well as other "humanistic" Buddhist masters especially in Taiwan, has further developed this vision by ensuring that Tzu-chi's works of compassion use the most advanced scientific methods and adhere to the highest professional standards in health care, disaster relief, and education.

At the same time that Tzu-chi is being very modern in this regard, it is adhering to some of the traditional aspects of the bodhisattva path. The practice of Buddhist compassion was traditionally directed not to abstract categories of people but to individual persons. It did not seek to change social structures but to help one individual at a time. Compassion also engaged the whole person, the body and the emotions, as well as the mind. As one followed the bodhisattva path, the continual practice of compassion changed one, caused one to develop bodhisattva virtues, that is, new habits of body, mind, and heart so that one could more fully embrace all sentient beings with care and wisely understand the interconnectedness of all things. These virtues would transform one's whole personality, so that one would not simply act compassionately while, for example, working in a charitable organization but acting in a non-compassionate way at home.

Thus, while adhering to high professional standards, Tzu-chi's philanthropic work differs from that of modern secular organizations by emphasizing direct, one on one engagements between the givers and recipients. When handing out food and clothing to victims of disasters, Tzu-chi volunteers do so individually, face to face, if possible while looking at the recipient directly in the eyes and bowing in a gesture of respect. One sees similar forms of direct engagement in Tzu-chi's medical and educational work. The result is forms of giving that are not as efficient or cost-effective as the best practices of many NGOs. But bodhisattva compassion is not about costs, it is about personal engagement with others that can lead both giver and recipient to expand their minds and hearts to develop ever fuller degrees of compassion.

Throughout, the emphasis is on doing rather than studying. Most Tzu-chi members I have met do a lot of intellectual work, but it is not aimed at reconciling Buddhist philosophy with modern philosophy (although there are indeed important affinities that would be intriguing for scholars to explore). Although interested in Buddhist teachings, they learn these mostly from the writings of humanistic Buddhist masters like Cheng Yen, Hsing Yun, and Sheng Yen. Most of these are in the form of short aphorisms, stories told in dharma talks, or practical exhortations. As far as I know, there is no readily available systematic treatise on modern Buddhist philosophy and ethics. The intellectual work done by members of the modern sangha is mostly about how to imbue modern science and technology and modern professional best practices with a Buddhist spirit (itself learned through practice) to apply to the challenges of the modern world.

One of the challenges is the problem of pluralism: the coexistence of many different religions and ethnicities, which has all too often led to serious conflict. This potential problem, however, is as much a benefit as a liability for Tzu-chi. Although it has become extremely popular not only in Taiwan but throughout Asia, Tzu-chi members are still a minority in the populations there. Tzu-chi could not use its power, even if it wanted to – to impose its practices on any nation or group. In line with most eras in the Buddhist tradition, the new sangha presents its practices as invitations rather than prohibitions. What is not generally provided in advice to lay members is a clear set of rules, like the monastic vinaya rules, for what one must not do. Exhortations are much more a matter of positive encouragement than negative warnings. Through various skillful means, they strive to cultivate deepening awareness of the fundamental interconnectedness of reality – to follow a path of cultivating virtues that would enable them to respond to novel situations with great compassion and true wisdom. The predominant ethic is a virtue ethic, not the application of complicated moral rules but the cultivation of expansive moral selves which can be properly motivated and wisely guided to bring healing and enlightenment to suffering beings everywhere.

In providing help to others, whether in the form of disaster relief, medical care, educational service, or environmental protection, Tzu-chi absolutely refuses to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, and political ideology. Nor is any effort made to proselytize recipients, although

Tzu-chi member would of course be happy if people were inspired by their example to join them. They try as far as possible to adapt to the beliefs of their recipients. When I went with a team of Tzu-chi volunteers to visit a woman who was stricken with AIDS, for example, they noted that she was a Catholic and wanted me to help them sing some Catholic hymns to her rather than Buddhist songs. Whether in giving to their recipients or training their own members, the overall approach of Tzu-chi and the other lay Buddhist organizations on Taiwan is to encourage them to be better rather than criticize them for being bad.

All of this is based on more than pragmatic considerations. It is a basic principle of the bodhisattva ethic. One cultivates virtue by pushing oneself beyond the boundaries of one's comfort level. One should not only help family members but also neighbors; not only neighbors, but those far away, even those who might be considered one's enemies. This principle drives Tzu-chi's global outreach, even to places like China and North Korea, as well as to Islamic, Christian, or secular countries – where there is need for alleviation of suffering. The practice of extending compassion in ever widening circles is not only a pragmatic effort, but also a spiritual exercise. It makes the Buddhist heart bigger and the mind able to see the whole world as a big family.

Tzu-chi is then a modern form of classical Buddhist practice. One does not have to “officially” be a Buddhist to carry it out. Not all Tzu-chi members have formally “taken refuge” in a temple. Among Tzu-chi volunteers there are certainly people who are Christians, or perhaps even Muslims. One does not have to believe in Buddhist doctrine to carry out Tzu-chi acts of compassion. Tzu-chi members welcome such non-believers. Yet, whatever they may believe, people who engage in Tzu-chi practices are being Buddhists, or more accurately bodhisattvas. They are following a path toward the fullness of life that originated in the Buddhist tradition and is inextricably connected to it.

What were the causes and conditions that enabled this modernization of traditional bodhisattva practice to arise in Taiwan's recent past? And what new challenges lie ahead to extend bodhisattva compassion without limit under modern conditions?

To cultivate, purify, and modernize such practices is generally not possible when people are consumed with the necessity of getting enough food and security for basic survival. The creative development of religious practices generally depends on what Robert Bellah calls a “relaxed field”, that is, a space of leisure within which cultural creativity can take place. In much of the past two millennia, this meant that ordinary people, pressed with the unrelenting demands of back breaking farm labor, could not find the social space for cultivating the virtues of compassion except by “leaving the family” and joining a monastery. Ordinary people carried out

Buddhist practices with a utilitarian attitude, as a means to get merit that might get them reincarnated into a pureland. Monastics were supposed to develop themselves more fully along the path to perfection and they could earn merit that could be given to ordinary people. But in modern middle class societies like Taiwan, people are not faced so much with pressing necessities for survival and they have the freedom to more fully develop the compassionate virtues themselves. Tzu-chi was a response to this new situation.

Tzu-chi is first and foremost a lay organization guided by commitment to bodhisattva compassion and closely connected to the monastic community established by Master Cheng Yen. It was Master Cheng Yen's genius to create such a vehicle for enabling lay people to develop their minds and hearts along the path of great compassion. The original social basis for this was the presence of a group of middle aged housewives in Hualien, who though not rich had enough economic security and leisure time to devote themselves to the cultivation of compassion. As Taiwan society became more prosperous, there were more and more people in this situation and more and more laypeople who could take advantage of the opportunities of Tzu-chi and of other lay Buddhist organizations established by other humanistic Buddhist monasteries. Another set of pressures that would have inhibited lay people from cultivating Buddhist compassion was the restrictions on association imposed by the martial law regime. When this was lifted in 1987 there was new freedom for many more people to seek Buddhist cultivation. Membership in Tzu-chi and other lay organizations grew explosively.

Even as the "relaxed field" of relative freedom from economic necessities and political constraint opened new opportunities for lay people to follow the bodhisattva path without becoming a monk or nun, these freedoms were creating spiritual needs that made the bodhisattva path more attractive. People in Taiwan no longer had to worry about basic needs like food and shelter. But global advertising and all the other institutions of an open consumer society constantly created new needs – insatiable needs based on the artificially stimulated desires of a modern capitalist economy. Without a way to regulate these desires, to set reasonable priorities among them, many people face constant anxiety and face the prospect of meaninglessness. The opportunities for cultivation offered by Tzu-chi offer a way to achieve ultimate meaning and heal anxiety. The very demeanor of the volunteers one meets at a Tzu-chi event is remarkably serene. The activities they undertake are meticulously and harmoniously ordered. The atmosphere is like that of a monastery but without so many of the complicated vinaya rules.

The Buddhist middle way does not negate the good and beautiful benefits of a developed society, but it puts them in perspective. The Tzu-chi halls are adorned with beautiful flowers and artifacts. The uniforms of Tzu-chi commissioners are simple but elegant. At Tzu-chi venues, high quality tea is served in porcelain cups. When rebuilding houses destroyed in natural disasters, Tzu-chi ensures that the houses are airy and comfortable. When giving out aid to

victims of disasters, Tzu-chi volunteers include not just food and water, but attractive clothing and other material accoutrements of a gracious way of living. The predominant effort is to affirm the benefits of modernity while curtailing the runaway desires that cause suffering.

Besides benefiting from economic freedom while helping to curb its excesses, Tzu-chi benefits from Taiwan's political freedom while providing a partial refuge from its troubles. Taiwan's transition to democracy has provided the opportunity for Taiwan to grow. But that democracy often leads to a cacophony of angry voices and sometimes seems headed for chaos. Tzu-chi stays away from partisan politics and the harmonious order of its activities provide a healing respite from the greed, delusion, and anger often provoked by contentious politics. At the same time, the virtues of generous compassion that Tzu-chi cultivates help engender the wisdom that citizens need to take a responsible role in democratic life.

Tzu-chi and other humanistic Buddhist organizations thus give laypeople a space to escape the troubles of late modernity, but not to escape completely. Rather they enable lay practitioners to return to the world so as to make it better. Tzu-chi members can make direct contact with friends and neighbors in a way that monastics cannot. They can also creatively combine their secular expertise with a Buddhist spirit. Examples would be the innovative gross anatomy program at the Tzu-chi medical school, which combines ways of expressing respect and gratitude toward the donated cadavers with advanced methods for teaching surgical techniques. Another example would be the pioneering establishment of palliative care in Tzu-chi hospitals. Other examples include the extraordinary creativity Tzu-chi members have put into multi-media education. Finally there are the efforts to encourage recycling and to make useful objects like blankets out of recycled plastic products. These and many others are examples of a level of modern creativity that could not have come out of the monastery itself.

The development of Tzu-chi is thus creating a new type of sanga, one that combines elements both of monastic life and lay life and expands the pursuit of virtue along the bodhisattva path. It is a sanga that is partially closed to provide an environment in which Buddhist virtue can be developed and open to the world which provides an arena for the exercise of that virtue. It is a traditional Buddhism reconfigured for a modern world.

This development of humanistic Buddhism has been made possible by the wise and creative leadership of Dharma Masters like Cheng Yen in the particular conditions of Taiwan over the past 50 years. But we know that the world is in constant change and the conditions that helped facilitate this efflorescence of compassionate practice will change too. We must anticipate the challenges that change may bring.

One way to anticipate the future is to look at the past. Although the Buddhist practice of compassion pushes beyond all limits, it has in history often been limited by the imperfections of people and institutions. One set of limitations can come from harsh rulers and a chaotic society that at certain times in history disrupted the spiritual path of Buddhists. Near the end of the Qing Dynasty, for example, the popular image of monks in China was that they were ignorant and corrupt, indeed one of the causes of China's weakness and an obstacle to its modernization. It was the task of reformers like Taixu to reform the sangha so that it could make a positive contribution to China's renewal and modernization.

Another set of limitations has at times come from the opposite direction -- from too favorable rulers who have coopted the sangha for their own political purposes. One unfortunate example comes from the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Japan, where many Buddhist sects officially contributed to the "spiritual mobilization" for the war against China beginning in 1937.

Besides being corrupted or coopted by external political forces, the sangha has at various times and places limited its practice of compassion by turning inward. Monastics undergoing similar regimes of rigorous practices will naturally develop special affinities with one another. This can cause them to look down on the world they have left behind and to refuse to actively engage with it. They can cling to the routines of their practices without putting all their heart into them and without being driven by the spirit of boundless openness the practices are supposed to engender.

A final set of problems from the past comes from the hardening of ideas about the meaning of Buddhist practices into rigid dogma and a fixation by the sangha on elaborating the dogmas rather than engaging in the practices that lay behind them.

If such limitations have occurred at various times in the history of the monastic sangha, they could certainly befall the sangha of lay practitioners like Tzu-chi. But today there are also unique conditions and we need to consider the challenges they may bring. As before, there is the danger of the turmoil caused by the collapse of political order and the rise of tyrannical rulers. But today the problem is globalized and with the prevalence of weapons of mass destruction there is the potential for more cataclysmic destruction. Particularly dangerous are conflicts between different groups driven by religious fanaticism.

There is now of course an unprecedented ease of instantaneous global communication which not only helps bring the world together in mutually beneficial ways but overwhelms and

distracts us with contradictory and often misleading information. Underneath all is an insatiable desire for economic growth that if left unregulated may lead to catastrophic climate change.

There is an overwhelming quality to the ensuing suffering, in some ways greater in breadth and depth than at any time since the Buddha was born. The anxiety created by this naturally leads many people to take refuge in the Buddha. The size of organizations like Tzu-chi is expanding. But because of the scope of troubles in the world the desire for refuge can become a wish to wall oneself off from the turbulent world rather than to extend compassion to where it is needed the most. For example, in some places in the USA, it seems that the membership of Tzu-chi is confined to the immigrant Taiwanese community. It becomes a place where one can meet with and enjoy the company of familiar others, people who share the same language and cultural background, rather than a vehicle for reaching beyond these boundaries in compassion to the wider world.

Under these conditions, the very success of Tzu-chi can lead to limitations. It now has millions of members around the globe and it has grown extremely rapidly since the 1980s. But it can be difficult enough to cultivate the virtues of deep compassion in a monastery of one or two thousand who can devote almost every minute to spiritual development. How can this be done for millions of people who necessarily also have to attend to work and family life? The number of new members can so outpace the earlier generation that the newer members cannot learn from the wisdom of the older generation.

Also, with size – and money – there can arise the temptation to wall oneself off from outside advice and criticism and to develop a kind of arrogance. In a large complex organization it can be difficult to learn from inevitable mistakes. Some of the controversies about Tzu-chi in the media in recent years might be caused not simply by misunderstandings but genuine mistakes which the practice of compassion should push the community to genuinely address.

I offer these remarks not in a spirit of pessimism but of hope. As long as the challenges I have mentioned can be recognized, we can hope that they will be overcome, so that the practice of compassion can continue to surpass all boundaries. On the other hand, the large amounts of suffering created by the modern world cry out for large organizations like Tzu-chi to alleviate their pain.

The true success of Tzu-chi – not just growth in numbers but modern cultivation of the virtues of compassion – would have important implications for ecumenical engagement with the crises

of modernity: a time when enormous technological advances have led not to global unity but to terrible conflicts rooted in the capitalistic greed, technological delusions, militarized anger, and ethnic hatreds of the modern world – with the nemesis of global climate change waiting in the wings. It is a period of social breakdown like the era that gave rise to Buddhism, Confucianism, prophetic Judaism, and Greek rationalism 2500 years ago – quests for spiritual unity that after initial flourishing were often subsumed by the wealth and power of ancient empires. Such disintegration, as before, can only be overcome through a renewed spiritual unity. So argued the great philosopher Karl Jaspers. But as he said, “The universality of a world order obligatory to all (in contrast to a world empire) is possible only when the multiple contents of faith remain free in their historical communication, without the unity of a universally valid doctrinal content. The common element of all faith in relation to world order can only be that everyone desires the ordering of the foundations of existence, in a world community in which he has room to evolve with the peaceful means of the spirit.” This means that it is impossible – and be foolish to try -- to reconcile the ideas in the various belief systems that have been handed down in religious traditions. But it can be possible for people living within such tradition to mutually engage others through practice. The real development of a world spiritual unity will come (if it comes at all before we destroy ourselves) through confronting our interdependent problems through practices. Buddhist compassion is not the same thing as Christian love or Muslim brotherhood, although they share much more in common than they differ. Such overlap is the perfect common space to begin to develop a foundation for a peaceful world order – to make this globe a pureland.

佛教教義是蘊藏大量教法的寶藏庫，其經文文字量超過《聖經》與教父學的文字。許多學者深愛著文字，我也是其一；我們的本能傾向於專注文字並有系統地將它們整理成理論，但這個做法卻也可能對宗教產生誤解。任何的理論都來自於一些行動的故事，宗教的教法主要是在解釋如此的行為。佛陀目睹了無法脫離苦難的人們，他離開他的王國，走進森林並加入苦行的群體，接著尋求中道，於菩提樹下證道；他的行為與宇宙間的意義最終透過經文被闡述。在許多佛教宗門中辯論著專研教義，抑或是落實於行為較為重要，因為行動包含了更多無法以文字完全闡述的意義。由這點來看，身為一位比較宗教學的學者，我認為實踐最為重要，學者及宗教信眾應該要超越教條，細思以實踐鞏固修行生活。

一般佛教的修行特點是具有開放性，藉由新的情勢而善巧地不斷修訂，顯著的稱喻為「行經」。修行者從一開始走上行經之路，儘管困難卻仍努力與堅持，但是修行者在一開始卻無法全然預料這條路會帶領他們往甚麼方向。當然，在北傳佛教傳統裡，主要的行經之路，也就是菩薩道，著重於實踐無限的慈悲。如此的慈悲修行並不只是為了達到某種目的，慈悲修行的目標在於使眾生得離苦，但修行者實踐慈悲的同時也忠於修行本身，即使修行者嘗試後，未能使眾生得離苦，但慈悲的實踐本身仍是很好的，這也體現了人人本具佛性。慈悲的實踐是一種儀式，它所展現的和所內含的益處是同等的，慈悲的實踐也沒有界限，

菩薩從不會限制自己的慈悲，他們總會依據世界的變化進而尋求新的方式來實踐慈悲。

菩薩道的其中一部分引導了慈濟。證嚴法師最顯著的說法是：「做就對了！」不要做純理性的探討。行動，在慈濟總部的圖書館裡有一個大空間，裡面充滿活頁夾的文檔記錄所有慈濟人進行的慈悲工程。為我介紹這個空間的人說：「這些，就是我們的大藏經。」

慈濟遵循了佛教傳統實踐慈悲，然而透過現代化的方式來實踐。這現代化的方式是符合二十世紀太虛大師和印順導師的改革與證嚴法師的創意加以擴展和融合；現代化的方式體現了淨化和專業慈悲心的實踐。中國從晚清時期，佛教的實踐已經與日常生活中的功利性經濟、社會和政治實踐混為一談。佛教儀式往往只是為了籌集資金，慈悲式的幫助別人，也往往只是為了獲得社會地位的手段。在佛教實踐裡，即使具備很少或不具慈悲心，也常常被視為是功德自來。這種思想在社會和政治改革者的觀點裡，佛教徒往往被視為是無明的，或是招致不道德的名聲。

像太虛大師這樣的改革者，為了淨化佛教，努力把貪婪、妄想和世俗的仇恨動機分開。這意味著注重佛教在實踐上的特性，就是將佛教與正常的經濟和政治活動加以區分，但要實現（至少部分地實現）這種區分，應該重新進入世界，努力癒合貪、瞋、癡所造成的傷口，並通過引發每個人的佛性，讓這個世界變成一個充滿關懷、愛心的淨土。證嚴法師與其他在臺灣推廣「人間化」的佛教大師們，以最先進的科技方法與最高專業標準的醫療保健、救災和教育，來確保慈濟慈悲的慈善工作願景，得到進一步的發展。

慈濟在這方面是非常現代化的，同時它也秉承了一些菩薩道的傳統特點。佛教慈悲實踐的傳統導向並非將人加以區別分類，而是針對個別的人；它並沒有尋求改變社會結構，而是專注在幫助一個人。慈悲心會牽動整個個人、身體與情感，以及思想。菩薩道的修行者會因為持續不斷地實踐慈悲而有所改變，由此生發了菩薩般的德行，也就是身體、思想和心靈的新習慣，這樣就能更充分地以愛心接受一切眾生，和明智地理解萬物相互聯繫的關係。這些德行將改變一個人的整體人格，使人們不會只有片面的慈悲行為，例如在一個慈善機構工作，但在家裡卻以不慈悲的方式做事。

因此，當秉持著高專業水準的同時，慈濟的慈善工作與現代世俗組織在於強調「直接」，即施者與受者一對一的互動方式。當發放食物和衣物給災害的受害者，慈濟志工是個別的、面對面的發放，如果情況允許，會和受者直接眼神交流，並鞠躬彎腰。在慈濟的醫療和教育志業，也可以看到類似的直接參與形式。其結果就是這種給予的方式在效率或成本效益方面，與許多非政府組織相比之下並不突出，但菩薩的慈悲並非以成本計算，這是以與他人互動，從而引導施者與受者雙方擴大自己的思想與內心，不斷開發更完整的慈悲心。

自始至終，慈濟強調的是實踐，而不只是理論學習。我見過大多數的慈濟人做了很多知識上的探討，但這不是為了調和佛教哲學與現代哲學（雖然這確實對學者是具有吸引力的探索）。雖然對佛教教義有興趣，但他們大多是從「人間化」的佛教大師如證嚴法師、星雲法師和聖嚴法師的著作中學習；其中大部分的學習都是以簡短的精闢句子形式、佛法講座的佛典故事或實際叮嚀。據我所知，目前沒有現成的著作系統地論述現代佛教哲學和倫理學，由現代僧團成員完成的知識探討成果，主要是關於如何灌輸現代科學技術，並以現代化專業的方式實踐佛教精神，也就是透過自身實踐學習，藉以適應現代世界的挑戰。

其中之一的挑戰是多元化的問題：很多不同的宗教和種族需要共存，這往往導致了嚴重的衝突。這個潛在的問題，對於慈濟來說是好處，同時也是負擔；雖然慈濟不僅僅只在臺灣受到歡迎，而是風靡整個亞洲，但在當地的慈濟人還是少數，慈濟不能使用權力或是想要強制任何國家或集團。在大多數的傳統佛教時期，新僧團呈現的做法是邀約而不是禁止；這並沒有一套明確的規則，不像寺院的戒律一樣，規定人們不可以做什麼，規勸往往都是正面的鼓勵多於負面的警告。透過各種巧思，他們非常精進地修行並深化基本的現實相互關係——透過大慈悲心與大智慧來回應新情況與修行。主要的倫理還是道德倫理，而不是複雜的道德規則，具有廣大德行的修行可以適當地被激發和明智地被引導，為無處不在的苦難眾生帶來療癒與啟發。

在給予別人幫助時，無論是在救災、醫療、教育服務，或環境保護，慈濟絕對拒絕種族、宗教和政治意識形態的歧視，也不是為了對受患者傳教，如果人們被他們的榜樣啟發而投身其中，慈濟人當然會很高興，他們盡可能地去適應受助人的信仰。當我與一隊慈濟志工一起去探望一位愛滋病貧困婦女，例如他們注意到她是位天主教徒，想讓我幫他們唱一些天主教聖歌給她，而不是佛教歌曲。無論是在給他們的受患者或培訓他們自己的志工，慈濟和其他臺灣佛教團體整體的做法是鼓勵他們朝向更好，而不是批評他們。

所有這一切都基於比實用主義更多的考慮，這是菩薩倫理的基本原則。一位修行者將會超越自我的舒適圈，人們不應該只幫助家庭成員，而要幫助鄰居；不僅是鄰居，還有距離遙遠的人，包括那些可能被視為敵人的人。這一原則推動著慈濟的全球化，甚至在中國和朝鮮，還有伊斯蘭教、基督教，還是那些需要離苦的世俗國家。在日益擴大的圈子擴大慈悲心的做法不僅是一種務實的努力，更是一種精神鍛鍊。它使佛教徒的心靈和思想更為廣闊，能視整個世界為一個大家庭。

慈濟是依循著古典佛教修行的現代形式；即無須透過成為正式的佛教徒，也能執行。並非所有的慈濟人都來自於佛門弟子，在慈濟志工之中，有著來自於基督教及穆斯林的朋友們；這些來自其他宗教的朋友們，無須受限於佛教的教義，也能實踐慈悲。慈濟會員們歡迎著大家，凡是投入慈濟者，皆視為佛教徒；更正確地說，皆被尊稱為菩薩。菩薩們踏著令生命富足且豐滿的道路；這條菩薩道，路上隨處可見的皆是佛教的傳統。

在過去數十載的臺灣，是什麼樣的因緣，促使傳統佛教能在現代社會裡發展起來？另外，在不久的未來，為了不受限於現代社會的情形，以及延續菩薩慈悲的慧命，又有什麼樣的挑戰須被克服？

在當代，人們為了生計而忙著工作，消費是為了取得食物及安全以求基本的生存條件；相對來說，修行、淨化等類型的創意發展之宗教行為，僅能在羅伯特·貝拉所謂的「安逸地」才有機會發生。在過去 2000 多年的許多時候，一般人因為永不止息的需求而忙著農作，在當時的社會，並沒有所謂的社群空間來培養美德，僅能透過離開家庭並加入僧院來達成。一般人對於佛教的實踐，有著一種急功近利的心態，想著奉行佛教實踐，以求得好處，並在下次轉世的時候，能達淨土。

出家人本就應該透過發展自我，以趨完美，並將這樣的美善奉獻給一般人。然而，在臺灣的中產階級，人們並不需要汲於生存，而能更自由且完整地發展慈悲喜捨的美德。慈濟，就是在這樣的新價值下，孕育而生。

慈濟透過承諾菩薩般的慈悲，與證嚴法師所帶領的精舍師父們緊密連結的引導之下，成為了第一且重要的世俗組織。證嚴法師創造了慈濟世界這艘大法船，創造了能培養身心，進而產生大慈悲心的環境。慈濟世界，起源於一群來自花蓮的中年家庭主婦，雖不富裕，但有著滿滿的愛心，奉獻出空間的時間，投入了慈悲喜捨的修行之中。當臺灣的社會越來越富裕，有越來越多的人想藉著投入慈濟當志工，或是投入其他佛教寺院團體當志工來修養身心。然而，當時戒嚴時期對於集會結社規定仍保留著，因此，人們仍會有所顧慮。到了 1987 年解嚴之後，越來越多的人感受到了改革開放的自由氣息，開始尋求佛教的培育訓練。在那個年代，慈濟的會員以及一些世俗組織開始蓬勃發展。

人們不需成為比丘或是比丘尼也能奉行菩薩道，也有機會能享有進入「安逸地」；這樣的自由提供了靈性上的需求，也讓菩薩道變得更引人入勝。臺灣人不再需要擔心食物及庇護等基本生存需求的問題。然而，全球性的廣告與開放性消費社會的所有機構，在持續散播並提供永不止息的消費管道，來滿足受到現代資本主義經濟刺激所產生的人為欲望。在缺乏規範這些欲望及制訂合宜的優先順序的情況下，許多人開始感到持續性的焦慮，也對未

來感到毫無意義。慈濟的培育正好是一個機會，讓人們能追求有意義的人生目的，並且能治療焦慮。慈濟志工在活動裡是那樣地具備風範且讓人感到明顯的沉著冷靜，他們所承擔的慈濟活動，都充滿著用心且和諧有序。這樣的氛圍，就如同在一般的寺廟裡，卻不受到繁文縟節的限制。

佛教中道並不否定一個發達社會帶來的善與美的好處，並且把它們納入觀點。慈濟靜思堂用美麗的鮮花和文物來裝飾，慈濟委員的制服簡單而優雅，在慈濟的場地裡，優質茶葉是用瓷杯所沖泡；當重建因自然災害摧毀的房屋時，慈濟確保了房子是通風且舒適的；當發放援助災民時，慈濟志工不僅給予食物和水，還以親切的方式給予吸引人的衣物和其他物資。慈濟的慈善救援肯定了現代化的好處，同時也減少了逃難時所帶來的痛苦。

慈濟除了從經濟自由中受益之外，也因為臺灣政治自由而獲益，並提供了心靈的庇護所。臺灣的民主提供了臺灣成長的機會，但是民主往往導致憤怒的聲音，有時似乎偏向混亂。慈濟與黨派政治保持距離，其活動的和諧性經常能療癒因爭議性政治帶出來的貪婪、妄想和憤怒。與此同時，慈濟的慈悲修行有助於提升公民採取負責任民主生活的智慧。

慈濟和其他人間化的佛教組織給凡夫一個空間脫離現代社會所帶來的煩惱，但卻不能完全脫離。他們讓非出家的修行者重返世俗，使世界更好。慈濟人可以與朋友和鄰居直接互動，但出家人卻不能，他們還可以創意地結合自身的專業知識與佛教的精神。例如慈濟醫學院創新的解剖學課程，結合了對大體捐贈者表達敬意和感恩，並利用先進的外科技術教學；另一個例子是慈濟醫院開拓建立的安寧療護；其他的例子包括慈濟人非常有創意地投入多媒體教育。最後，還有努力鼓勵環保回收，製造了非常有用的塑料環保毯子。這些都是出家人本身無法創造出來的現代創意例子。

因此慈濟的發展正在開創新的僧團，一種結合了出家生活和在家修行的方式，來推廣菩薩道；半開放的僧團提供了發展佛教美德的環境，對世俗世界的開放則給世人一個實踐佛學美德的平臺。這是一個傳統佛教重新迎合了現代世界。

過去的五十年，證嚴法師在臺灣特殊條件下，以明智且創意的領導方式下展開人間佛教。然而，我們知道世界不斷地在變化，實踐慈悲的風氣也會跟著改變，我們要時時刻刻面對這些改變帶來的挑戰。

預測未來的方法之一是回顧過去，雖然佛教慈悲的實踐已經超越所有極限，它仍然在歷史上受到人們和機構的不完善所限制；其中一種限制可能來自當時苛刻的統治者和混亂的社

會，在歷史中的某些時期打亂了佛教徒的心靈修行之路。例如在晚清末年時，中國僧人的普遍形象是昏昧和腐敗，這確實是中國衰弱且妨礙了它現代化的原因之一；這就像太虛大師這樣的改革者，所肩負的任務在於僧伽制度的重整，使其能夠為中國的復興和現代化建設作出了積極貢獻的任務。

錯誤的決策造成另一個侷限，其原因是太多統治者為了自身的政治利益而募集信徒。二十世紀的日本就是一個悲慘的實例，1937年多數佛教門派因「國民精神總動員」被派往中國打仗。

除了因政治因素遭受迫害，也因不同的時間、地點影響了內在的憐憫心。當僧者歷經長期的政權嚴厲統治，久而久之產生特殊心理，使得他們輕視世界並拒絕積極付出；他們依著常規生活，卻不盡力融入其中，也不具備有廣大無邊的菩薩精神。

最後的問題是自古以來將佛教實踐的意義變成了僵化的教條，以及僧團重視闡述教條，更勝於實踐佛教理念。

如果這在歷史上不同的時間曾發生在僧團裡，它可能也會發生在像慈濟這樣的修行團體，但現今我們仍然必須顧慮面臨特殊情況所帶來的挑戰，就像以前，存在了因政治秩序的崩潰和專制統治者崛起所帶來的動盪危機；現今全世界面臨頻繁的武器攻擊，造成災難性的破壞，特別危險的是不同宗教團體間的宗教狂熱思想製造了各種矛盾。

現有的全球即時通訊，不僅以互惠互利的方式將全世界聯繫在一起，但也往往因為誤導性信息的矛盾淹沒了我們。然而，這隱藏著經濟增長的貪婪欲望，若不受管制，將可能導致破壞性的趨勢。

我們現在所經歷的巨大痛苦，在許多方面比起佛陀出生以來的任何階段，都來得更廣、更深，因此越來越多人信仰佛教，尋求生命寄託，像慈濟這樣的組織團體開始擴展，但是因世界紛亂，人們只想在動亂的世界裡找尋心靈寄託而非落實慈悲來幫助困苦的人。例如在美國某一些地區，慈濟仍在朝著向全世界超越慈悲界限的方向努力，雖然有一些來自臺灣的移民，習慣見面時彼此陪伴、分享共同語言與文化背景。

如此情況發展下，慈濟若要擴展地非常成功將受到侷限。慈濟自1980年代起迅速發展，現在全世界有好幾百萬名會員，但是要在只有一、兩千名法師的佛寺裡修行心靈仍具挑戰

性。另外，眾多的會眾要如何去平衡自己的日常生活呢？即使新加入慈濟的人數量可以超越過往，但卻無法學習到資深慈濟人的智慧。

此外，通常像這麼龐大的組織，很容易形成自有的文化，而忽略了外界的建議與批評，漸而偏向較於自信。在一個大型規模的組織團體中難免無法照顧周全，無可避免要從錯誤中學習。慈濟近幾年在媒體上的爭議，不只是因為誤會所造成，真正的誤會是慈悲理念的實踐還未被社區理解。

以上發表內文並不是帶著悲觀的情緒，還是有著希望。只要我所提及的問題都能被辨識，我們就能期待克服這些問題，因此慈悲的修行將能持續並超越所有藩籬。就另一方面而言，現今世界存在著許多的苦，這些苦難正向著像慈濟這樣的大型組織呼喚，期望助他們脫離苦難。

慈濟真正成功之處，並不在於數據的成長，而在創造了現代慈悲觀的修行方式，更因其具有以普世價值參與當代危機的重要意義。這些危機是當代日新月異的科技並未引領全球團結一致，而是造成可怕的衝突；這些衝突的原因在於資本主義的貪婪、科技的妄想、軍事化的憤怒、種族間的仇恨，加上全球氣候變遷的反撲也正蓄勢待發。

這個世代的社會價值觀瀕臨崩潰，就如二千五百年前的社會狀況，各宗教和思想家應運而生，如佛教、儒家、猶太教、希臘唯理論，都是幫助人們尋求心靈的皈依。在初期蓬勃發展之後，各宗教或理論通常是由古代帝國的財富與權力作為主導，這種分歧的現象，唯有透過再次心靈上的統一，才能加以克服。

德國著名哲學家和精神病學家卡爾·雅斯貝爾斯卻有不同的見解，他說：「世界秩序之所以能普遍化（而不是大一統帝國），唯有多元信仰能夠在歷史的交流中維持自由化，而不受限於統一的教義內容。」

所有信仰與世界秩序只有在一種情況下才能有共同的認知，也就是每個人都渴望祥和的社會（地球村），在這個地球村，人人都能有心靈的伸展空間——其實這是「不可能的」，而且是很愚昧的嘗試——試圖在各個淵源已久的宗教之間，調和不同的信仰，那是不可能的。但是如果我們讓人們在不同信仰的傳統中，透過身體力行，那麼就可以彼此融合。

世界精神團結的真正發展終將透過實踐、面對互相依存的問題而到來，如果我們在它到來之前還沒有摧毀我們的地球的話。

佛教的慈悲和基督教的愛及回教的兄弟會是不同的，雖然它們的共通點遠比不同點多；因此這些共通點正是一個完美的共同空間，讓我們一起發展一個祥和的世界秩序——轉此世界為淨土。