

## A Liberally Conservative Point of View

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### *Is Nichiren Daishonin liberal or conservative? And what about the 'World Tribune'?*

Advisory: This article will offend you. Or not, depending on your point of view.

Nichiren Daishonin once wrote that “Hungry spirits perceive the Ganges River as fire, human beings perceive it as water, and heavenly beings perceive it as *amrita*. The water itself is the same, but it appears differently according to the karmic capacity of individuals” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 163). Buddhism teaches that there are at least 10 different ways to look at any one thing, and our perceptions shift as our life-condition changes.

What’s more, Buddhism posits that all phenomena are in constant flux. Therefore, not only do our perceptions change, so do the things we perceive.

Of what, then, can we be certain? Gandhi once said that “truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth.”

In light of Buddhism, I would say that faith is the only certainty; we can be sure only of the faith in our hearts. That’s what the Daishonin taught — and he didn’t coerce anyone into living his way. Rather, he led people to awaken to the faith inherent in their lives....

So, does that make the Daishonin a liberal or a conservative?

It depends on your point of view, of course. Lately, in spirited discussions regarding the perceived liberalness or conservatism of the *World Tribune*, I’ve found that participants are hard-pressed to agree on definitions for these terms. What some people call conservative, others would call reactionary or fascist. What some call liberal, others call big-government-loving or *really* fascist. (Yet some say that being liberal has more to do with organic goat farming.) It’s meaningless, I feel, to evaluate the *World Tribune* in relation to these ultimately meaningless terms.

Whether we call ourselves liberals or conservatives, I think we generally agree that the goal of the *World Tribune* is to educate rather than indoctrinate, to stimulate thought rather than control it. SGI President Ikeda has said that the *World Tribune* “will be instrumental in cultivating a peaceful future,” and most SGI-USA members see it as a “textbook of faith.” It seems to me that education is integral to the *World Tribune*’s mission, since peace, culture and education are intertwined.

So instead of arguing about labels, maybe it would be more interesting to evaluate the paper in relation to education and free thought. For example, is there a genuine democracy of ideas on its pages? Or mere lip service to or superficial depiction of diversity? Is it a paper full of conviction and hope? Or of self-congratulation and bluster? Does it call attachments and prejudices into question? Or does it reinforce the status quo?

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian, once wrote, “The consciousness of one’s eternal responsibility to be an individual is the one thing needful.” Individuality is the essence of the SGI’s stand-alone spirit. It’s what sets successors apart from mere followers.

Should individuality be expressed or suppressed in the *World Tribune*?

SGI President Ikeda has recently said that “where there is an atmosphere of lively discussion, where people can say or ask anything, it is bright and joyful. In such an environment, there is growth, the rhythm of *kosen-rufu* — of moving forward — is there.” Is this the atmosphere of the *World Tribune*?

Even with regard to this question, we all probably have differing perceptions. The only

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conclusion I can reach — from the point of view of someone on the *World Tribune* staff — is that the paper is a work in progress. Its future isn't pre-destined; it's in *ku*, the realm of non-substantiality. Like anything else, it's fluid and responsive to prayer and determination. So love it or hate it, keep reading, keep chanting and keep those letters to the editor coming. (Even if they don't get printed, they do get read.)

Sometimes, the paper and the organization seem like a slow, lumbering brontosaurus; it takes a long time for a message to travel from its tail to its brain and back again. That's one perception.

My perception is that — in the realm of faith — anything can change, anytime.

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