



## The elections are over. Phew! Now what?

Clay Nelson © 8 November 2020

My advertised title for today's musing was "The elections are over. Phew! Now what?". After the predictably chaotic US election I think a better title would have been "The elections are over. Phooey! Now what?" But, upon reflection, I am now leaning towards "The elections are over. It was a curate's egg".

You may not be familiar with the phrase. I wasn't before coming to New Zealand. It goes back to a cartoon published in *Punch* by the Victorian era's most celebrated cartoonist, George du Maurier, grandfather of novelist Daphne du Maurier. The cartoon shows two clerics having breakfast. One is a bishop and the other is a curate, the lowest of the low in Anglican Church hierarchy. The bishop apologises to the curate, "I'm afraid you got a bad egg. Mr Jones." To which the curate responds, "Oh no, my lord. I assure you parts of it were excellent!" The joke of course is that if part of a boiled egg is bad, all of it is bad.

Over time the phrase has lost that meaning and is used to mean something more like "a mixed bag", some parts are good, some are bad. If looking at the two elections in which I have invested my vote, this meaning would apply. The New Zealand election result generally reflected my Unitarian values, if not my degree of commitment to them. The election was a model for the best of democratic elections. The US election, even if Biden is ultimately sworn in as president, reveals a country so polarised that little if any good will result from it. By itself, it reflects the original meaning of the curate's egg, there is nothing good to celebrate. But in conjunction with the New Zealand election, the more contemporary meaning applies. It is just the hard-to-swallow part of a mixed bag.

That's what happened. Now what? There is not much we can do about the US situation, even if we are mesmerised by watching the train wreck. The best we can hope for is to avoid the shrapnel as the Civil War 2.0 escalates. Our focus needs to be here. My fear is that having a government that appears to largely reflect and support our Seven Principles will lull us into complacency; thinking there is little left to do. Relieved that our election is over, I want to think that was the end of the story not the beginning of a new one. It has been exhausting. But that is not the case. We need to give ourselves a moment to decompress, take a breath and then start writing the next chapter of our common story.

Unitarians have a long history of social activism. We were at the heart of promoting religious tolerance, democracy, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, labour rights, civil rights, inclusion of the Rainbow Community, to name only some. We can be proud of that history, but now it's our turn to make history. I have the hope that our great-grandchildren might look back on us and be proud of their ancestors. Proud because we dismantled structural racism, eradicated colonial oppression, saw the nation's wealth more evenly distributed, achieved zero carbon emissions, encouraged diversity, fulfilled Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, attained full gender equality in all aspects of our society, significantly reduced violence against women and children, and anything you

would like to add. I hope they will celebrate New Zealand being a model of social, economic, and earth justice for the rest of the world. That's a full plate so we best get started, taking small bites.

To be effective we need to understand the four roles required for social change. Bill Moyer's book *Doing Democracy: the MAP model for organising social movements*. The follow is an extract that summarises the roles:

*"Activists need to become aware of the roles they and their organizations are playing in the larger social movement. There are four different roles activists and social movements need to play in order to successfully create social change: the citizen, rebel, change agent, and reformer. Each role has different purposes, styles, skills, and needs and can be played effectively or ineffectively.*

*"Social movement activists need first to be seen by the public as responsible **citizens**. They must win the respect and, ultimately, the acceptance of the majority of ordinary citizens in order for their movements to succeed. Consequently effective citizen activists need to say "Yes!" to those fundamental principles, values, and symbols of a good society that are also accepted by the general public.*

*"At the same time, activists must be **rebels** who say a loud "No!" and protest social conditions and institutional policies and practices that violate core societal values and principles.*

*"Activists need to be **change agents** who work to educate, organize, and involve the general public to actively oppose present policies and seek positive, constructive solutions.*

*"Finally, activists must also be **reformers** who work with the official political and judicial structures to incorporate solutions into new laws and the policies and practices of society's public and private institutions. Then they must work to get them accepted as the conventional wisdom of mainstream society.*

*"Both individual activists and movement organizations need to understand that social movements require all four roles and that participants and their organizations can choose which ones to play depending on their own make-up and the needs of the movement. Moreover they need to distinguish between effective and ineffective ways of playing these roles. Understanding a social movement's need to have all four roles played effectively can help reduce antagonism and promote cooperation among different groups of activists and organizations."*

We are a small congregation. We can identify with Truman the turtle I read about to the children. The task seems almost impossible. That is no excuse not to do our part.

This is an important year in the life of our congregation. I am in my seventh year as your minister. The literature says this is a time when we should look at how things are different from when I first arrived. The congregation was in serious decline. It had a history of being conflicted. You wanted that to change. Membership increased. Sunday attendance increased. An ethos of hospitality and generosity took hold. Our Peace and Social Justice initiatives increased significantly. All that is good and we can be justifiably proud, but it is now time to formulate new goals for the next seven years based on where we are, not on where we were. We are now strong enough and confident enough to trust our well-being. We need now to use that strength and confidence to serve the community beyond these walls. For the moment we have

beaten back the virus, but we paid a high price. New Zealand is looking at how to build back up better and use the opportunity to correct injustices that have been allowed to become enshrined in our society. We need to be part of that, not just spectators. What can we do as a progressive faith community to help? There are many who are suffering, having lost employment in these turbulent times. How can we offer love, hope and support to them as they seek meaningful employment?

I would like to see an ad hoc group formed of those interested to explore the needs out there beyond our doors and formulate new goals we might commit to as a congregation for the next six to seven years.

It will be good for our souls.