

*Holy Communion*  
*And the Declaration of Interdependence*  
Psalm 148  
July 3, 2016

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This weekend our nation is celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Independence is a good thing. Especially when we think of independence as freedom from the oppressive and exploitative control of others, like a colonized people asserting their independence from their colonial master.

Or children becoming independent. Parents who're mature adults try to raise their children to grow up and become independent. Not just because the parents want to turn their kids' bedrooms into studies, art studios, or home entertainment centers when their kids move out, but because they truly desire to see their children mature and become increasingly less financially, emotionally, and psychologically dependent on them. They want their grown children to become grown, mature, independent adults.

Unfortunately, this is become increasingly difficult as more young adults are saddled with heavy debts by education loans, as housing costs and other cost-of-living expenses steadily rise, and as fewer jobs pay salaries that enable young adults to pay off their debt, pay for housing, and thereby become more independent. More young adults are finding they must live with their parents long after they'd like to move out and become independent. More young adults are finding they must, to some degree, remain dependent on their parents through their 20s and into their 30s.

This may be yet another indication that our economic system, while good at producing profit and wealth for some, is failing to meet a real human need for others, and therefore, our economic system is in some ways unhealthy and unjust. Bernie Sanders hit a powerful chord with many young adults by making this issue a foundation of his campaign.

Furthermore, this situation with young adults illustrates the fact that we do value independence very highly, and when people's independence is hindered and denied, we view this as unhealthy and unjust.

Independence, however, when taken to extremes, can itself be unhealthy and unjust. Independence has a shadow side.

People can see their independence as freedom from responsibility and accountability to the others with whom they live in relationship. People can see their independence as the freedom to do what they want without consideration for other people's needs. Without consideration for what the earth's ecosphere needs to maintain an environment that's healthy for humans and other species. Without consideration for the larger community that sustains one's life, for the common good.

The fact is we are, at the very core of our being and in all the ways we exist, relational beings. Our lives come into being, and from birth to death our lives are sustained by, relationships. Relationships with other people. Relationships with the earth's ecosphere.

Yet some folks, by valuing independence too highly as the ultimate good, can distort it. They can fail to see and appreciate the inherent and unavoidable relational nature of their life. They can fail to see and appreciate that no matter how independent they are, they are also always dependent on other people and the earth. They are always responsible for, and accountable to, a larger community.

The failure to see and appreciate the inherent and unavoidable relational nature of life leads to all kinds of harm and suffering. All kinds of unhealthy and unjust situations. Pope Francis, in his encyclical on climate change, identified the over-valuing of independence, the distortion of independence, as one of the chief culprits of our economic and environmental woes. “Once the human being declares independence” from one another and the earth, the Pope wrote, “the very foundations of our life begin to crumble”

So independence is in reality a tricky proposition. While placing a very high value on independence, we must also realize and appreciate that we are, and will always be, dependent on other people and the earth. The trick is to learn how to be both independent and dependent. The trick is to learn how to be both free, and responsible and accountable to others.

Some people today see this dynamic—being free, and responsible and accountable to others—as the growing edge of human knowledge, wisdom, and culture. Many cultures went through a long phase where a focus on the freedom of the individual liberated a great many people from oppressive tradition-bound relationships. This was one of the projects of the West’s Enlightenment era, where over time, more individuals gained more freedom to think and act according to their own conscience or desire. During this era, many people identified individual freedom as the highest and ultimate good.

Today, some people see us entering a new era, one in which more people are coming to the realization that while focusing on individual freedom is necessary and good, individual freedom is not the highest and ultimate good. There is a next stage in our human development. We’re moving from a focus on independence to a focus on interdependence.

A focus on interdependence values and strives for freedom from oppression and exploitation, but at the very same time, it fully realizes the extent and the depth of the relationships in which our lives are intertwined. The relationships that sustain each and every life. Interdependence seeks to find that tricky equilibrium that balances each individual’s freedom with each individual’s accountability and responsibility to other people and the earth, to the larger communities that sustain each person’s life, to the common good.

So today, as our nation celebrates its Declaration of Independence, I’d like to recognize all the good that has come from a commitment to freedom and independence. But I’d also like to be forward looking, and recognize the need for a Declaration of Interdependence.

There are actually several Declarations of Interdependence in existence. I believe the philosopher Will Durant wrote the first one soon after the Second World War ended in an effort to promote greater racial tolerance. Durant’s Declaration reflects the view that humanity, having focused on individual freedom, must now move to the next stage of human development by focusing on developing relationships of mutual respect between diverse groups of people, especially those separated by racial prejudices and biases.

“Human progress, having reached a high level through respect for liberty,” Durant’s declaration states, must now “promote harmony in diversity... promote human fellowship through mutual consideration and respect... champion human dignity and decency,” and “safeguard these without distinction of race, or color, or creed.” “ROOTED in

freedom...sharing everywhere a common human blood, we declare again that all men are brothers, and that mutual tolerance is the price of liberty.”

In more recent years, Declarations of Interdependence have focused on not only human interdependence, but humanity’s interdependence with the earth. The one I find most powerful is the one the Suzuki Foundation wrote for the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. This one I’d like to read in its entirety; it’s not too long.

## **THE DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE**

### **The Suzuki Foundation**

#### **This we know**

We are the earth, through the plants and animals that nourish us.

We are the rains and the oceans that flow through our veins.

We are the breath of the forests of the land, and the plants of the sea.

We are human animals, related to all other life as descendants of the firstborn cell.

We share with these kin a common history, written in our genes.

We share a common present, filled with uncertainty.

And we share a common future, as yet untold.

We humans are but one of thirty million species weaving the thin layer of life enveloping the

world.

The stability of communities of living things depends upon this diversity.

Linked in that web, we are interconnected — using, cleansing, sharing and replenishing the

fundamental elements of life.

Our home, planet Earth, is finite; all life shares its resources and the energy from the sun, and

therefore has limits to growth.

For the first time, we have touched those limits.

When we compromise the air, the water, the soil and the variety of life, we steal from the endless future to serve the fleeting present.

#### **This we believe**

Humans have become so numerous and our tools so powerful that we have driven fellow creatures to extinction, dammed the great rivers, torn down ancient forests, poisoned the earth, rain and wind, and ripped holes in the sky.

Our science has brought pain as well as joy; our comfort is paid for by the suffering of millions.

We are learning from our mistakes, we are mourning our vanished kin, and we now build a new politics of hope.

We respect and uphold the absolute need for clean air, water and soil.

We see that economic activities that benefit the few while shrinking the inheritance of many are wrong.

And since environmental degradation erodes biological capital forever, full ecological and social cost must enter all equations of development.

We are one brief generation in the long march of time; the future is not ours to erase.

So where knowledge is limited, we will remember all those who will walk after us, and err on the side of caution.

### **This we resolve**

All this that we know and believe must now become the foundation of the way we live.

At this turning point in our relationship with Earth, we work for an evolution: from dominance to partnership; from fragmentation to connection; from insecurity, to interdependence.

For me, another term for interdependence is Holy Communion, which simply means, *holy union with*. Through the Spirit of Christ, we seek to live in holy union with one another, with all other people, and with the earth itself. We seek to embody, in our own bodies, the spirit of Christ, so that we can relate to one another, with all other people, and with the earth itself, in the same way Christ relates to all people and the earth. With love, compassion, wisdom, mercy, and humility. With a recognition of the inherent dignity of each and every individual, including ourselves. But always with a deep concern for the needs of others, and for the well-being of the larger community that both sustains us and depends on us.

Holy Communion is not simply a ritual—a sacrament—that we participate in once a month at church. *Holy union with...* is how we seek to live our daily lives. In committing ourselves daily to live in holy union with...we ourselves become sacraments—living visible signs—of the reality of interdependence. Of the reality that God seeks to liberate, heal, and reconcile this creation so that all may exist together in Holy Communion. We ourselves become agents of interdependence. Agents of Holy Communion.

So this July 4, do more than celebrate the Declaration of Independence. Declare your interdependence. And in doing so, make a sacred vow to make your life a sacrament of Holy Communion.