Open Source Jesus
A Manifesto for a
Liberated Church

Cody Cook

Introduction
A Tale of Two Communities

This is an essay about how the free sharing of useful information benefits the human community. This premise appears so obvious as to not merit discussion, but when it is applied to real world scenarios, controversy always follows. Let's look to two distinct communities that have applied this principle in their own unique contexts: the open source movement (also known as the free software movement) and the Christian community (also known as "the church").

For those who are unfamiliar with the open source/free software movement, it emerged from the mind of Richard Stallman out of a very practical concern. During the 1970s, when he was working in the Artificial Intelligence Lab at MIT, Xerox donated a laser printer to the lab. Though this was a

handsome gift, it had a constant issue with paper jams. Because of its inconvenient location, when it did jam usually no one was there to fix it, causing significant delays. The programmers at the AI Lab decided it would be useful to write a program for the printer that would notify users when there was a jam, but the source code—the program's instructions as written by Xerox—was being kept hidden from the users. As a result, even though these programmers were *capable* of adapting the software to make it work for them, they weren't *allowed*. Xerox could have made the changes for them, but since they didn't find it worth the cost of time and manpower to fix the software for the AI Lab, the problems remained. In other words, progress was stymied.

Eventually, Stallman heard that someone at Carnegie Melon University had a copy of the software's source code and asked if he could have a copy of it as well. Unfortunately, this colleague had signed a non-disclosure agreement which essentially served as a promise to Xerox that he wouldn't share the code with anyone. In other words, the software was made to remain proprietary.

Stallman, saturated in the programming community ethos of the time, thought that the ideology behind proprietary software was anti-social and anti-human: humans are naturally communitarian and desire to help one another;

proprietary software inhibits this instinct. These issues eventually prompted Stallman to quit his job at MIT in order to work on a "free" (as in free speech, not free beer, as he is apt to say) operating system that made the code available for anyone to use and modify. Though he made money selling copies of the *individual* programs in this system, called GNU, the source code was made available for anyone to look at, modify, share, etc.; thus the distinction between free software as being like free speech and not free beer.[1]

Perhaps the most well-known "free" or open source software is the Linux operating system. An operating system is the software that supports a computer's basic functions and that other programs can be built on top of. Examples of operating systems include Windows 10, macOS, and Android. Linux was the first complete "free" operating system, though it integrated many pieces of GNU software as well and is thus referred to by Stallman and some others as GNU/Linux. Since an operating system is the central program that allows a computer to be used, the creation of a completely open source OS was a watershed; thus Linux has been the central

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[1]   Stallman's recounting of this story is available in his speech "Free Software: Freedom and Cooperation," transcribed in the book <u>Free Software, Free Society: Selected Essays of Richard M. Stallman, 2nd ed.</u>

rallying point of the open source movement.

Defining Our Terms

The basic definition I will be working from when speaking of the open source community is a group of individuals who believe that users are best served when source code is freely available to be shared and modified. This is somewhat looser than how Stallman would define the free software movement, as his definition is centered around radical opposition to proprietary software as unethical.

The basic definition I will use in this writing for the Christian community (aka "the church") are those individuals who are joined together through our union with Jesus Christ, the divine Savior who took on flesh, was crucified, and was resurrected to redeem us and bring us into relationship with the Triune God. Christian beliefs are centered primarily around God as revealed in Jesus Christ, but our scriptures—the Bible—are also a significant rallying point for us. Sharing the gospel freely and seeking the good of our neighbors are central focuses of the Christian life. The central practice, also called evangelism, of making freely available the gospel message can be seen in the lives of Jesus' earliest disciples, in their method of disseminating their

writings, and in the history of their textual transmission, which will be discussed in more detail later.

At root, both of these movements have a strong philosophy of community and neighborliness, of sharing information that is deemed as useful or important without the fetters of an oligarchy that restricts access, and of the freedom to adapt this information to new situations in order for it to remain relevant.

Indeed, in fundamental ways, one's worldview is like a computer's operating system. To process whatever data comes one's way, one needs a compatible and reliable operating system. A poor program will process data imperfectly or not be able to integrate it at all. At a certain point, a proprietary operating system will hit a wall and become obsolete—unable to process new data for new circumstances. At this point, a user is at the mercy of the software proprietor to update the software for them according to what the proprietor thinks is most important. In other words, a closed, proprietary program can't be fully understood by its users or adapted to their varying needs—it will become obsolete.

The Christian worldview, if it is to be useful, must be true (a program which meets the needs it

was designed to), open, adaptable to changing situations, and free to share. Primarily, this means that the Christian scriptures must not be kept from the fuller community by a few who only communicate the message of these scriptures as *they* see it, according to what *they* think we need to know. Developments in theological thought must also be as accessible as is possible in order for the community to grow and benefit. These theological developments might be compared to added features or "patches" which help software function in new practical and intellectual environments.

However (and this is one major difference between open source programs and the Christian "program") our Christian "operating system" must remain fundamentally the same at its "kernel." We cannot replace a central kernel like "Jesus is Lord," with, for instance, "there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his messenger." Thus, our analogy can only go so far. The central tenets of Christianity cannot be modified or changed and still remain fundamentally Christian, nor are we at liberty to change the content of our scriptures.

What we can and should do is to make this kernel freely available to all and to allow Christians at all times and places to participate in further developments and distributions. Thus, a kernel like "Jesus is Lord" can have various kinds of compatible

software built onto it. For Christians oppressed by tyrannical governments, a program like "and Caesar is not" can be built onto the operating system.

Later users looking back at this software may see what bugs might have been mistakenly written into the code, fix those bugs, but keep the incredibly useful features that a program like "and Caesar is not" brings to the operating system. Occasionally a program will be added onto the operating system that is so buggy that there is nothing for it but to uninstall it. Programs that, for instance, encourage religious violence or undermine the essential humanity or divinity of Jesus are fundamentally incompatible with the kernel and cannot function in the Christian operating system.

Before I go into any depth on how these two communities have worked out their philosophies of free sharing both in theory and in practice, I would like to make a quick detour into how the framers of the United States Constitution understood the concept of intellectual property and what we can extract from their principles. I do so because it provides a useful philosophical framework for pursuing these issues (one might argue that the American value of freedom is a historical bridge between Christian teaching and the open source movement) and might shut down some potential objections to free information philosophy.

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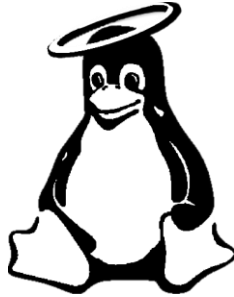
Chapter 1
The Promotion of Progress

"The Congress shall have Power... to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries"
-The United States Constitution, Section 8.

The wording of this pericope of the United States Constitution is fascinating because the argument advanced for "intellectual property" is not the same argument usually invoked today to defend it. To be specific, it does not say that ideas expressed in a social context belong to their individual originators as a natural right like physical property belongs to its owner. In fact, it assumes that they don't. Stallman, in commenting on this clause, notes that:

> "If copyright were a natural right, something that authors have because they deserve it, nothing could justify terminating this right after a certain period of time, any more than everyone's house should become public property after a certain lapse of time from its construction."[2]

If intellectual property is not really property, then why did the framers decide that we should act, for a limited time anyway, as though it is? The explanation is in the passage itself—the primary recipient of the benefits of this clause is not the author, but society. Giving creators special rights to their expressed ideas encourages them to put forward their time and energy into producing more useful ideas for society because they know that they will be compensated for their efforts.

That "intellectual property" is not the same as physical property is easily demonstrated. When, for instance, filmmaker George Lucas makes a movie influenced by the style, plot, or themes of films by Akira Kurosawa, this is not the same as George Lucas stealing a prop from Kurosawa and using it in his own films. In one scenario, something has been taken from someone so that they no longer possess it: something is now missing from Kurosawa. In the

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[2]   ibid, p. 79.

other, Lucas has simply been influenced by an idea and adapted it for his own purposes. We may use the language of "stealing" and "borrowing" in these circumstances, but these are metaphors. No object in possession of the first party has been truly taken by the second party.[3]

Furthermore, this kind of intellectual "borrowing" is necessary for community to exist. We learn how to exist in our society by following the lead of those around us. Society continues to move forward by passing along ideas and values, and often adapting them to new situations. In a very real sense, there are no original ideas. Everything we think is a "remix" of something else we have heard or thought before.

This doesn't mean that those who put forward ideas shouldn't be given credit for them or shouldn't be able to make a living from them, but it does mean that society flourishes from an open environment where ideas can be shared. The more often useful ideas and information are shared, the more society can benefit. Knowledge is power, so the free sharing of knowledge empowers everyone in the community.

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[3]   This is not to say that we shouldn't give credit to the originators of ideas that we borrow or develop—out of respect for the authors and to help bring our own readers to know the sources that have benefited us, we ought to credit the originators of ideas we find to be useful.

However, society is also made up of human beings, and human beings are motivated to act by personal gain, or at the very least we hope not to incur a loss. As a result, the Founders argued, progress is spurred on when those who come up with great ideas can make a living from them. Society benefits from this arrangement as well as they are the recipients of a useful idea or technology, but this benefit is diluted when intellectual property laws restrict the normal social use, development, and adaptation of ideas.

The United States' Founding Fathers recognized both of these truths and crafted an elegant compromise—the government ought to recognize ideas as a form of property, for a limited time, in order to benefit society. This is drastically different from the primary reason they recognized physical private property, which is that the owner of this type of property actually has a natural right to not have that property borrowed without his consent. Thus, the struggle is to find a balance between encouraging innovation and creativity—by enabling creators to profit from their ideas—and not stifling the sharing which is necessary for a community to thrive and add its own creative impulses to that innovation.
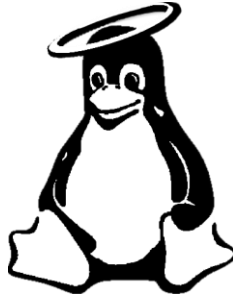
Chapter 2
Philosophy of Community

At the heart of Stallman's beef with non-free software is his evaluation of community and what it means to be a neighbor. When proponents of closed software call sharing "pirating," Stallman retorts that they have made sharing with your neighbor "the moral equivalent of attacking a ship."[4] Stallman accuses the "proprietary-software social system" of being "antisocial... unethical... simply wrong," and that this is really an issue about "what kind of society we are allowed to have."[5]

In other words, sharing is central to a society.

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[4]   Richard Stallman, Free Software, Free Society: Selected Essays of Richard M. Stallman, 2nd ed., p. 141.
[5]   ibid, p. 18.

We are supposed to, for example, help each other solve problems. The closed software model, in many cases, forbids this from happening.

As a result, Stallman's Free Software Movement is built around the idea that:

> "computer users deserve the freedom to form a community. You should have the freedom to help yourself, by changing the source code to do whatever you need to do. And the freedom to help your neighbor, by redistributing copies of programs to other people. Also the freedom to help build your community, by publishing improved versions so that other people can use them."[6]

While many (including myself) wouldn't go quite as far as Stallman does in his denunciations of proprietary software, his concerns are not invalid. The free software movement seeks to address these concerns brought about by an "antisocial" system by providing a context for community and neighborliness. In fact, one popular Linux-based operating system, Ubuntu, takes its name from a Nguni Bantu term literally meaning human-ness that, at its core, defines a person as only being a person through other people. This term has also been

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[6]   Accessed 2019/11/09 at https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-software-intro.html

popularized in the English-speaking world through the words and work of South African former archbishop Desmond Tutu.

A remarkably similar philosophy of community also pervades Christian thinking. At the center of Christian theology is the Trinity—the one God who exists necessarily as three distinct Persons. This complex unity is expressed in 1 John 4:8 with the simple phrase, "God is love"—love in His very essence. "Before" there was a creation for God to love, He already existed in self-giving love as Trinity. For God not to be love would be to undo Himself since He could not continue to exist as Trinitarian community without also being love. Thus, community is an essential attribute of God. As Eastern Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas wrote in his book *Being As Communion*, "being means life, and life means communion... It is communion which makes beings 'be': nothing exists without it, not even God."[7]

What Zizioulas is saying should not be glossed over. The three divine persons can in fact only be persons in relation to one another—there is no such thing as a person apart from other persons. And since we are made in the image of God, we

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[7]   John D. Zizioulas, Being As Communion, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: 1997. p. 16-17.

share God's quality of existing as persons only insofar as we exist in community.

As the Methodist theologian Dennis Kinlaw wrote:

> "If Jesus is the prototype of all other persons, then persons never exist alone, because the Son cannot be explained apart from the Father and the Spirit. He is distinct in himself but inseparable from the Father and the Spirit. He and all other persons always operate in webs of relationships because persons, human or divine, by definition do not and cannot stand alone."[8]

The New Testament makes the communitarian natures of God and humanity clear, arguing that the goal of salvation is our shared participation, through Christ, in the divine energies. Thus, Jesus prayed this prayer to the Father about His followers:

> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

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[8]   Dennis Kinlaw, Let's Start With Jesus, Kindle Edition.

This fellowship with God is only possible because of the incarnation, the act by which God the Son joined Himself to us by becoming a man so that we could be united with God. Our connection to Christ is so intimate that the apostle Paul refers to the Christian community as the body of Christ:

> "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Romans 12:5).

So strong is this emphasis of community in scripture that one can almost hear in Stallman's words about neighborliness echoes of Jesus' summary of much of the moral law in the aphorism "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). For Jesus, neighborliness means behaving lovingly; and love is connected with giving and sharing. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan man "proved to be a neighbor" (Luke 10:36) when he *gave* of what he had to help a stranger. In the oft-quoted John 3:16, we know that God loved the world because "He gave His only Son."

Paul developed this theme as well. When he reflected on what God gave to Him (the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ) even though he didn't deserve it, he claimed that he felt under debt or obligation to share this same message of love with all people (Romans 1:14). When he meditated on how Jesus as God did not grasp His divine rights, but

took on human frailty to serve out of love, he used this as an example to encourage believers in the city of Philippi to likewise look out for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4-11).

To say that persons can only exist in community does not mean that Christianity denies individuality. Far from it. The apostle Paul, using the metaphor of the Christian community as the Lord's body, explains that just like human body parts, all of us have distinct abilities and characteristics. We should seek to work together as one body, but this does not make any of us less important or our individuality a negative thing. Furthermore, we cannot be relational if we are not also individual. Kinlaw explains:

> "Karol Wojtyla [known to Roman Catholics as Pope John Paul II] insists that one of the key marks of personhood is self-possession, which is another way of referring to a person's incommunicable individuality. This becomes especially significant when we speak of the fact that a person's fulfillment comes only in self-giving love. Individuals cannot give away their selves in self-giving love if they are not first of all in possession of their own selves."[9]
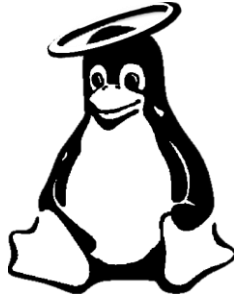
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[9]   Dennis Kinlaw, Let's Start With Jesus, Kindle Edition.

Open Source Jesus

The Christian conception of anthropology is therefore neither individualistic nor collectivistic, but an integrated balance of our dual natures as individuals who develop their life and identity within a community. Perhaps one might call it communitarian, relationalistic, or mutualistic. But the point in any case is that for there to be a "we," there must be a "you" and a "me." And as the Trinity teaches us, the reverse is also true.

Thus, a liberated church is not concerned with the free exchange of information alone, but with building a community where "users" of the Christian operating system can help, encourage, and share with one another so that we might grow together as individuals.

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Chapter 3
The Palace and the Bazaar

In 1997, Eric Raymond, a software developer who used and promoted open source methods, wrote an essay (later published in a book of the same title) called "The Cathedral and the Bazaar." In it, he compared two different approaches to open source software development. In the first approached, dubbed "the Cathedral model," software developers work on a program in secret and only release the source code when the program is finished. This allows for users to make suggestions for future versions, but also results in a finished program that is released with far more bugs.

In contrast, the Bazaar model keeps the code available at every step of the way, allowing for interested coders to make corrections and

suggestions before the program is officially released. This approach allows for the release of a final product that is more dependable and requires less patches. This is because, according to Raymond, "given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow" (Linus' Law).[10] These two approaches are, of course, named after social centers. A cathedral is a center of social activity wherein a few leaders organize their ideas carefully and then speak to the group, allowing the group to take these polished ideas out and try them on. The bazaar is more like a web of inter-connected activity. What comes out of the bazaar is not the result of one voice, but many.

Like the open source community, the church has used both approaches to share its ideas. At times, great minds have worked on ideas, polished them carefully, and then submitted them to the broader community to think about and adapt—see for example Thomas Cranmer's singular influence on Anglican theology with his *Book of Common Prayer*. However, much of the church's thinking comes out of conversations and relationships that can't be traced back to just one person.

Christians can read the original source code

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[10]   Accessed 2019/11/09 at http://www.catb.org/esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/cathedral-bazaar/ar01s04.html

of their faith, the Bible. Moreover, we can also carefully review the features which other communities have added in an attempt to deploy the Christian kernel in a wide variety of contexts. When we carefully examine both the biblical data *and* the various distributions and applications developed by other communities (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, etc.), the benefit for us will be a versatile faith that can be better applied to our own lives. The Bible is meant to be read within community and applied in the lives of both communities and individuals. For that reason, Christians would be foolish to ignore how other groups and individuals in the body of Christ have made their own applications for the Christian source code—and to not "steal" their added code when it is helpful to do so.

Of course, these aren't the only models for software development. There is also the closed source or proprietary model, which might be likened to a Palace. Commoners are not invited to the palace, but declarations are made from inside that the non-elite have to simply accept. In the software world, this means they can't look at, make suggestions about, or modify the source code, but must take the end product as it is. In the Christian world, this applies to any model wherein members of the community are not given the privilege of accessing the mind of God by being allowed or encouraged to

read the Christian scriptures as well as other great Christian thinkers and traditions, but must go through an intermediary that keeps the Christian "source code" to themselves and gives us an operating system with the features *they* think we need.

At certain points in western history, many, though by no means all, leaders in the Roman Catholic Church fought against Bible translations as well as liturgy in the vernacular languages of Christian people. They feared having the faith taken from them and placed in the hands of common people. Therefore, church authorities simply had to be trusted to be representing the faith accurately. In the minds of these authoritarians, the Pope and the Magisterium reserved the right to control the faith and create by themselves the Christian operating system which all the faithful should be pleased to accept. Of course, this is also true in protestant and cultic churches where leaders discourage their people from examining the source code themselves and making suggestions about fixing the bugs that their leaders introduced. This is Palace Christianity.

The apostles believed that as eyewitnesses of Jesus chosen by Him to spread the message, they had an obligation to protect this message. They wrote accounts and letters as a means to ensure that the correct Christian doctrine was taught and

understood. They then released this information to all Christians (a mixed fellowship of human beings that the elite men of the day often derogatorily characterized as being composed of slaves and women) and encouraged them to adapt this information to their own unique circumstances. This is reminiscent of the cathedral model.

Those who were capable of teaching within local churches were encouraged to do so, thus taking their own knowledge of scripture and adapting it to their local situation. More than that, the scriptures were read in local churches regularly, allowing even the illiterate to have access to the Christian source code. Everyone could then participate in building the Christian religion. In this we find parallels to the bazaar model.

Furthermore, the books that would eventually form the New Testament spread throughout the world by means of free, wild copying. Had Paul or the other New Testament authors restricted copying in order to increase their profits or control their intellectual property, the message of salvation would not have spread as it did. Because the New Testament authors embraced an "open source" model of sharing the content of the faith freely and widely, the good news spread. The New Testament authors didn't want to make people dependent upon *them*, as power-hungry religious authorities often seek to

do,[11] but upon God. This required an open approach to getting the information they had—the kernel that Jesus is Lord and what this meant in their lives and times—into the hands of as many people as possible.[12] It also made it possible for the church to develop applications which were compatible with the
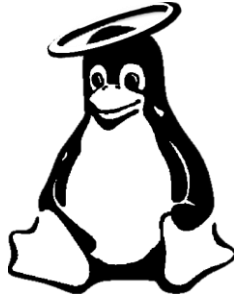
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[11]   See Jesus' response to such people in Matthew 23:13.

[12]   This open approach also had one more important impact on the Christian faith—free and promiscuous copying led to an increasing number of textual variants. Skeptics often point to these variations from one New Testament manuscript to another as evidence for their untrustworthiness. "If there are variants," they reason, "how can we know what the originals said?" But it is in fact these variants that point to the trustworthiness of the New Testament textual tradition, and we can once again thank an open approach to the sharing of apostolic teaching for this. As for the difficulties posed by variants, as the agnostic New Testament textual critic and professional skeptic Bart Ehrman has acknowledged, "most textual variants... have no bearing at all on what a passage means" – the vast majority of variants are differences in spelling, accidental line skips, etc. He also agreed with the Christian textual critic Bruce Metzger that "the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament" (Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus, p. 252, 1st Ed Paperback). Contrast this with the Muslim Uthman's Palace-style approach, wherein he rounded up variant manuscripts, destroyed them, and produced one uniform version of the Qur'an without variants (See Sahih al-Bukhari, 6:61:510). This resulted in a text which has quite possibly kept Islam's source code (the original Qur'an) from the eyes of Muslims, thus leaving them to trust an intermediary authority.

indispensable Christian kernel while simultaneously meeting the ever changing needs of Christian users.

Cody Cook

Chapter 4
The Laborer Is Worthy of His Wages

What does using a more open approach mean for us today? Should software producers and Christian thinkers feel obligated to give away their time and energy gratis? Is it immoral to withhold information that is beneficial to society because you might not get paid as much as you think you deserve? It might be helpful to start with how Jesus' earliest disciples might have answered this question.

When Jesus sent out His disciples to preach the gospel, he told them that if they found an interested party who was willing to support their basic needs (food, shelter, etc.), they should not be ashamed to accept such support, "for the worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7, NIV). In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul applies this saying of Jesus to elders

within a local church, focusing in particular on the honor that elders in the church deserve for their labor.

But in 1 Corinthians 9:3-14, Paul defends his honor against critics in the Corinthian church by pointing out that even though it would have been entirely fair and reasonable to expect the church to support him while he was there doing the hard work of organizing, supporting, and teaching the church, he chose to support himself with non-ministerial work to show them that he had a genuine concern for them and was not simply interested in their money. He reiterates that this was not a requirement for him but a choice he made: "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Cor 9:14).

In other words, Paul preached the gospel for free. He also encouraged local church leaders to do the same in Acts 20:33-35:

> "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

However, Paul also seems to have occasionally been provided financial support from churches as is evidenced by 2 Corinthians 11:8-9:

> "I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way."

Without these donations, Paul would have had to support himself entirely while traveling as an itinerant preacher and church builder, which wouldn't have left him much time for actual teaching and church building. At the same time, he did not want to rely on the money of the people he was serving, thus it was important to him to be able to provide for himself. Paul's motivation for supporting himself with an occupation outside of his gospel work seems to have been two-fold: 1. to show his sincerity amidst the threat of accusations that he was fleecing the flock and 2. a sense of obligation to pass along what he had been freely given by God. God had saved Paul, and now Paul wanted to pass along the good things of God that he himself had not deserved: "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Romans 1:14, KJV). For Paul, the best way to fulfill this moral obligation to share the gospel was to not

demand monetary payment for his work in doing so.

However, Paul makes it clear that his model is not compulsory for all gospel workers—the laborer is indeed deserving of his wages. We should not be spiteful toward those who work to survive—all of us do it on some level. But the open model is one that ought to inspire us to share more and look after the interests of others. The results speak for themselves—the free proclamation of the gospel without concern for profit encourages the spread of genuine and free Christianity. Similarly, an open approach to software has created programs that are dependable, community-supported, adaptable to any situation, and in many ways far superior to their closed alternatives.
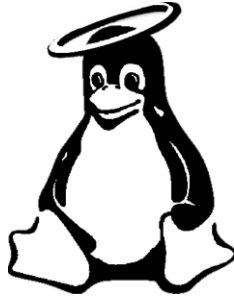
Conclusion
Being as Communion

Open, community-based Christianity as well as software development have both (in their own unique ways) created significant benefits for the world. Christianity has shared the good news of the love of God, encouraged us to think about human life as objectively sacred, and emphasized the value of community. The open source movement has made useful software available for anyone who can afford a computer, fulfilling a three-fold role of promoting personal freedom, technological advancement, and a strong sense of community and concern for others.

But while these philosophies have immense power to change the world, they are often marked by insular thinking and infighting. People in the open source community argue about philosophy vs.

practicality while Christians get into spats over their own doctrinal disputes. While these debates are not unimportant, they often result in the creation of unnecessary enemies, uncharitable suspicions, and false representations. In other words, they divide communities that ought to be seeking to unify as much as possible.

In our philosophy of what humans are and ought to be, what must be kept in balance are the extremes of individualism and collectivism. On the one hand, individualism can cause me to believe that my thoughts and desires are the only ones that matter. On the other, collectivism forces a kind of group-think that eliminates genuine freedom and individuality. The philosophies undergirding Christian community and the open source movement, should we seriously reflect upon them, provide the antidote to such thinking—we need not be radical individualists or collectivists, but we must exist as valuable individuals related within communities.

Yes, we are who we are because of our relationships. There can only be an I where there has been a thou. I can think complex thoughts, speak, and act in the world only because other people were good neighbors to me—they shared who they were and what they knew so that I might grow. Being a good neighbor is sharing, and followers of Jesus

have something of great value to share with the world: the gospel about Jesus Christ who shares His life with us. Being is itself sharing—to be, we must first be in communion with others. It is this communion which makes humans be, just as it is with the God who made us in His image.

A manifesto for a truly liberated community of faith must then include these points:

1. We recognize that communion is what makes us be. This is true on an ontological level, it is true on a salvific level, and it is true on an ecclesiological level. As creatures made in God image, we are unavoidably relational. As humans joined to God through Christ, we are irrevocably dependent on our Lord for our salvation and eternal life. And as co-members of Jesus' body, we are inextricably joined together in Him. We demonstrate this reality when we come together to celebrate the sacrament of communion, a reminder that I have taken the life of Jesus into myself and am therefore connected with every faithful believer who has ever done likewise.

2. We respect the contributions of brothers and sisters of different times and places and seek to integrate them whenever they can contribute to the Christian operating system.

3. We share the gospel as all good neighbors share good things with each other. We share the whole of it: not just a pared down kernel, but the good news about how Jesus has managed to touch and redeem every aspect of our lives, regardless of our context.

Let our prayer be that the prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father be fulfilled in us:

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me...
Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world...
I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."
-John 17:20-26

About the Author

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