

## FRIENDS OF THE SOIL

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In the second chapter of Genesis we find these words, "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward . . . and took the man and put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it." In twenty-four simple words the ancient writer, in seeking to explain an historical fact, set forth a basic spiritual law which is the keystone of *FRIENDS OF THE SOIL*—a movement designed to lead men "to recover and secure their kinship with the holy earth, and to establish justice on the land through the instrumentality of a consecrated rural church." *FRIENDS OF THE SOIL* is sponsored and administered by the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen and was born of the conviction that it is the divine business of religion to bind up the wounds of the land and people, to save soils and souls, to make the earth fruitful and beautiful—to dress it and to keep it—and that man cannot attain his full stature until he humbly and reverently allies himself with the spiritual forces inherent in the earth.

*FRIENDS OF THE SOIL* is a distinctly religious movement whose purpose is further set forth by its founders as follows:

To lead men to regard the earth as holy and man as the steward of the Eternal; to assist the rural church to minister to the total life of the rural community; to work for the reclamation of the soil and other natural resources; to seek by word and action to restore man to his divine earth-right to the end that justice may be established on the land and a richer, fuller, and more abundant life may be the lot of all.

The following ten objectives still further clarify the purposes of the *FRIENDS OF THE SOIL*:

1. To lead men to regard the earth as holy and to cultivate a reverence toward it, and especially the life-giving soil upon which the well-being of our people rests.

2. To strengthen and fortify the rural church as the servant of God in its task of bringing healing to our land and its people, and to interpret the task of the rural church to the nation at large.

3. To declare to all the message of the Christian religion regarding the right use of the soil and of the just relationships that must exist between man and man if we are to build here a nation of free people.

4. To combat the exclusive ownership of the land by the few who rob the many of their God-given earth-right, and to strive for such economic and social arrangements as shall afford security, peace, and a more abundant life for those who till the soil.

5. To seek to use the land—the common heritage of all—for the preservation of the home and the enrichment of the family, and to strive for the protection of the soil and its fruits against the ravages of man.

6. To work toward the development of a subsistence and abundant agriculture especially in the South, and to seek a healthy balance between industry and agriculture in the region.

7. To sponsor such legislation as will enhance and promote the welfare of rural America; to cooperate with federal and state agencies engaged in improving the health and economic security of our people upon the land, and with other agencies that are working toward a just rural order.

8. To work for reforestation, soil reclamation, flood control, crop diversification, and such programs as will further the purposes of *FRIENDS OF THE SOIL*.

9. To honor publicly those who have performed exceptional services in rural areas.

10. To organize local groups, especially through the churches, to work toward the realization of these goals.

The idea that it is man's business to dress the earth and to keep it is far-reaching and of profound significance for our day. The acceptance of this idea involves not alone a new conception of man's relationship to the soil but of those human relationships that arise from tilling and owning the soil. Those who despoil the earth stand under the judgment of God no less than those who oppress His people. To rob the soil of its fertility is to rob the human family of an opportunity to secure from the soil those material