

**Institutional Organization, Stewardship, and Religious Resistance to Modern  
Agricultural Trends:**

The Christian Farmers' Movement in the Netherlands and in Canada

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Modern agriculture is based on the ideology of economic efficiency and rationality. It is characterized by increasing mechanization, reliance on the use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides, biotechnology, and capital intensification, resulting in the imposition of a simplified agro-ecosystem upon vast landscapes. Remote-controlled machines, high-rise animal apartments, artificial environments, and a rural landscape largely devoid of people and wildlife dominated the vision of the agriculture of modernity presented in an article in the National Geographic in 1970. Since 1970, a number of commentators have argued that this mode of agriculture is based on a series of reductionisms, reducing the complex biological character of life to its physical-chemical components and reducing human culture to a narrow set of economic considerations. People are viewed as separate from nature, and the earth is but a factor of production. Such reductionisms are seen to underlie the environmental crises and socioeconomic problems besetting modern agriculture. Increasing attention is being paid to agricultural groups who offer different visions based on an alternative environmental ethic and set of socioeconomic arrangements.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to examine the history and significance of the two Christian Farmers Federations (CFFs) in Canada in resisting modernizing trends in agriculture.<sup>2</sup> The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) and the Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta (CFFA) have their origins in the Dutch neo-Calvinist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the migration of members of this movement to Canada after World War II.<sup>3</sup> The CFFs have inherited from Dutch neo-Calvinism a “transformational” approach to Christian social action in

agriculture, an approach giving rise to the development of separate Christian institutions. The transformational version of Christianity is to be distinguished from three other versions in its ambition to engage society and its structures in order to reform them in a thoroughgoing manner. “Separatist” Christian groups effectively abandon society and withdraw or separate from it. In “church-centered” Christianity, Christian action in society is less ambitious and always organized through the church or its officers. The “individualistic” Christian approach results in Christians acting as isolated individuals within the established social order.<sup>4</sup> One of the most important distinguishing characteristics of Dutch neo-Calvinism has been its development of, and support for, a wide range of separate Christian social institutions aimed at transforming the world in accord with Christian principles such as justice and stewardship. One of these social institutions was a farmers’ union. The next section outlines the history and role of this farmers’ union in the Netherlands and its transference to Canada after World War II. The vision, principles, and policies of the two Canadian Federations are examined, and finally, the extent to which this movement of Christian farmers has been able to resist modernizing forces in Canadian agriculture is evaluated.

The Christelijke Boeren en Tuindersbond (CBTB--Christian Farmers and Gardeners Union) was formed as a national organization in the Netherlands in 1918, but its origins can be traced back to the Christian Social Congress of 1891. At that congress, Abraham Kuyper, later prime minister of the nation, called for a Christian program to tackle the social problems of the day. He promoted the development of “sphere sovereignty,” the establishment of distinctively Calvinist institutions in all areas of social

life. One outcome of Kuyper's work was the formation in 1892 of "Boaz," a Calvinist employers' organization. In 1895, this organization of 2,800 members included 343 farmers and market gardeners. In 1918, three specialist employers' organizations emerged out of Boaz, one being the CBTB. Some provincial Calvinist farmers' associations had existed a few years earlier, usually formed in response to increasing secularism in existing "non-confessional" farmers' groups and the growing influence of socialism in labor relations. With the introduction of proportional representation in the Netherlands in 1918, Calvinist farmers wanted to ensure that they had adequate national political representation. The CBTB also promoted and developed Calvinist institutions for agricultural education.<sup>5</sup>

"Pillarization" is the term often used to describe the religious pluralism that developed in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Calvinists, Catholics, and non-confessional organizations were established in nearly every area of social life. In Dutch agricultural circles, pillarization meant that three main general farmers' organizations were established: the CBTB, the Dutch Catholic Farmers and Gardeners Union, and the non-confessional Royal Dutch Agricultural Committee. There were also three farm workers' unions, one Calvinist, one Catholic and one socialist.

Between the 1920s and 1950s, the CBTB was a part of an increasingly formalized national public structure in agriculture. This structure, "industrial organization under public law" (publiekrechtelijke bedrijfsorganisatie or PBO), an industry-wide social and economic arrangement, was a traditional concern of European Christian Democratic

movements. It was most comprehensively developed in the Netherlands after World War II, particularly in agricultural circles. In some ways, PBO in agriculture was the official recognition of a system that had been developing informally. For example, from 1922, the executive committees of the three farmers' organizations met annually in consultation, and from 1937, regular consultations took place between the farmers' and farm workers' organizations. After the Second World War, because of PBO, a more formal arrangement was instituted between the six organizations with the formation of a Federation of Agriculture, leading in 1954 to an Industrial Board for Agriculture.<sup>6</sup>

The Dutch government regarded the Industrial Board for Agriculture as the authoritative voice of organized agriculture on matters of agricultural and economic policy, and it had autonomous regulatory powers with regard to a wide range of agricultural concerns. Commodity Boards represented other interests in the agri-food sector. Until the late 1980s, Dutch agricultural policy-making was practically the sole prerogative of these two boards and the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmers' and farm workers' organizations were also represented on the Dutch Social-Economic Council, a kind of overarching board, which has had an important advisory role to government since the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> The arrangements that developed in Dutch agriculture in many ways represented the political and legal expression not only of Kuyper's neo-Calvinistic vision of sphere sovereignty but also of the Catholic social principle of subsidiarity and the socialist concern for functional decentralization.<sup>8</sup>

Only a very few of the Dutch Calvinists who migrated to Canada after the Second World War had firsthand experience of the CBTB. Many, however, brought with them an

appreciation of the significant role that a confessional farmers' organization could play in public life. Public life in Canada shared few of the characteristics of Dutch pillarization, but this did not stop some of these migrant farmers from attempting to reproduce such institutional arrangements in Canada. Their vision was an outrageously ambitious one. Their aim, in conjunction with their fellow Christians, was to transform Canada into a Christian country. Separate Christian institutions, such as the CFFs, were seen to be an important vehicle for public activity witnessing to Christian principles that should be implemented at the national level. Despite the development of a "separate" Christian organization, a "separatist" approach was rejected. The aim was to maintain a Christian distinctiveness at the institutional level in order to engage society at large, not to create an institution that turned away from that society. Some members may have sought shelter from the world in the CFFs, but the founders of the groups did not share that aim. Furthermore, the very structure of the organizations facilitated engagement. One of the constitutional objectives of the CFFs, taken from the CBTB, was to cooperate where possible with other farmers' organizations. Another was to be significantly involved in the formation of public agricultural policy at both the provincial and national levels.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of Dutch Calvinist migrants to Canada in the period following the Second World War went to the province of Ontario, although significant numbers went to Alberta and British Columbia as well. It was in Ontario in the early 1950s that Dutch Calvinist farmers formed a small number of local Christian Farmers Associations. This was at a time when others in the Dutch Calvinist community were establishing Christian institutions in a number of areas.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the development of the Christian Labour

Association played an important role in encouraging the establishment of a Christian farmers' organization.<sup>11</sup>

Initially, some of the migrant farmers met together as a Christian Farmers Association to share the difficulties of being agriculturists in a new land. Some had not even been farmers in the Netherlands. In a Christian farmers' group they could share their experiences and problems with people of the same national, linguistic and religious background and listen to invited speakers, who could give expert advice on farming and living in Canada. From the beginning, however, some of them had a broader vision for an organization of Christian farmers, based on their familiarity with separate Calvinist institutions in the Netherlands in general and, in a few instances, their knowledge specifically of the CBTB. They considered being involved in the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, established in the 1940s, but were critical of its lack of a voluntary individual membership. The Ontario Farmers Union was being organized in Ontario in the 1950s, but its socialist principles made it unsuitable. In March 1954, representatives of four local Christian Farmers Associations met and established CFFO as a provincial federation. In 1955, eleven local associations existed containing just under 300 members. The local associations and the provincial federation adopted the CBTB constitution. A number of aspects of this constitution were inappropriate to the Canadian context. For example, reference in it to the "social problem" reflected the history of troubled agricultural labor relations in the Netherlands. The CBTB constitution implied an organization active in public agricultural affairs (which became a reality for CFFO in Ontario only in the early 1970s), engaged in relationships with farm workers'

organizations (which did not exist in Canada at that time), part of a national effort at increasing the economic and technical situation of agriculture, and associated with a Christian agricultural schooling system (again absent in Canada). CFFO was open to membership by all Christians although all the early meetings were held in Christian Reformed churches and the dominant language of the organization was Dutch until the 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

Due to lack of support, however, CFFO ceased activity at the provincial level in 1956. It was revived in 1961 but faced times of struggle and uncertainty for a number of years, although a few of the local associations always remained active. Between 1967 and 1970, CFFO became more firmly established. A part-time employee promoted the federation mainly within the Dutch Calvinist migrant community, and a new group of younger members was attracted. CFFO started to become active on the Ontario farm political scene, making contact with other farmers' organizations and with the government. In 1971, CFFO hired its first full-time employee, who enabled the federation in the early 1970s to begin to address a wide range of agricultural issues and to gain media coverage in Ontario.

From 1975 to the early 1980s, CFFO membership grew slowly but steadily, reaching a peak of about 640 members in seventeen local associations in 1979. It was at this stage that stewardship was introduced into the federation's public policy stance as a key Christian principle for agriculture. Stewardship involves a rejection of absolute ownership and emphasizes the wise management of a resource on behalf of others. Within the Christian tradition, stewardship has often been understood from a dominion

perspective--people as stewards of the creation have the task of dominating the earth by developing it to meet human purposes. But stewardship has sometimes been understood as earthkeeping, a concept implying that the natural creation has an inherent value apart from usefulness for human purposes. The steward's role includes the protection and preservation of the earth, which at times requires that people refrain from development for the earth's sake. In the second half of the 1970s, CFFO's view of stewardship had elements of a dominion perspective, although the federation later moved to a more earthkeeping understanding. Much of its public policy effort at this time was directed toward preservation of the family farm and protection of agricultural land from urban and industrial encroachment.<sup>13</sup>

From the early 1980s into the 1990s, many family farmers in Ontario faced difficult financial times and a mounting debt burden. The government recognized CFFO as an important general farmers' organization, one of three such organizations in the province concerned with a wide range of agricultural and rural land-use matters. It addressed these economic issues in cooperation with government and other farmers' organizations, promoting a compassionate approach. The federation developed a critique of some aspects of modern industrializing agriculture and began to support a range of alternative agricultures based on an understanding of stewardship that incorporated elements of earthkeeping. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, CFFO became a leader in addressing environmental issues at the farm level in Ontario agriculture.

The Dutch Calvinist farmers in western Canada did not initially intend to establish a Christian farmers' organization as their eastern counterparts did. In Alberta,

some became active in such organizations as the Christian Labour Association, the Christian Action Foundation (later to merge with the Committee for Justice and Liberty, the forerunner to Citizens for Public Justice, a political lobbying group), and the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (later to become the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the activist National Farmers Union campaigned for new members in Alberta. Around the same time, Dutch Calvinist farmers in the province became aware for the first time of the existence of CFFO. A small group in Neerlandia, north of Edmonton, desired to give expression in institutional form to a Christian perspective in agriculture and in 1971 became, in effect, a local association of CFFO. After a visit to a number of Dutch Calvinist migrant communities in Alberta by CFFO's executive director, the Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta was established in 1974 and gained membership in areas of Dutch Calvinist settlement in the province. CFFA developed independently of CFFO--the two federations are located on opposite sides of the continent where the nature of farming and provincial politics in the two regions are different. Some differences in approach and position have also been apparent from time to time. However, much correspondence has passed between them, policy perspectives are often shared, some joint projects have existed, and regular annual consultations have taken place. The two are effectively independent sibling organizations.<sup>14</sup>

CFFA was able to avoid the initial problems faced by CFFO in the 1950s and 1960s. It had the confidence to set about immediately building support to engage effectively in Christian social action in the public sphere. A full-time employee was hired

a few weeks after CFFA was established, and early in 1975 CFFA made its first public policy submission. From the beginning, stewardship was one of the main principles expressed in its work. In 1977, CFFA employed two researchers to report on the historical forces that had shaped Canadian agriculture. By 1980, however, the presentation of public submissions had become the main task of the federation's staff, along with the running of a third-world development education program. CFFA was particularly active in provincial land-use issues in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when its membership peaked at around 380 in eight local associations. As the 1980s progressed, CFFA, like CFFO, turned its attention to farm financial issues and became a leader in environmental issues in agriculture. CFFA also operated largely with support from members of the Christian Reformed Church, although it constantly sought members from other denominational backgrounds.<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the 1980s, the fortunes of the two federations began to diverge. A number of CFFA locals became inactive, membership declined, and income dropped. Significant staff turnover occurred and not all could be replaced. By 1992, it became apparent that CFFA could no longer address each major agricultural policy issue as it arose. The federation was consciously reoriented toward broader issues shared with an urban constituency. In that year, CFFA changed its name to Earthkeeping and restructured its boards and committees. A number of CFFA's founders had always envisioned the organization as addressing such a breadth of issues while others had argued for a farmers' organization primarily dealing with more narrowly-defined agricultural interests. CFFA's new name, Earthkeeping, reflected the view of stewardship

that had come to characterize the policies and activities of CFFA throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, membership of Earthkeeping numbers around the 200 mark.<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, CFFO maintained its level of support and flourished at the beginning of the 1990s, its membership stabilizing around 650. In 1994, legislation required farmers in Ontario effectively to support one of the province's general farmers' organizations. CFFO's modeling in the 1950s on the organizational structure of the CBTB meant that it had developed in Ontario as a general farmers' organization with a set of geographically based local associations. It therefore came within the legislation's definition of a general farmers' organization. CFFO experienced a sudden, five-fold increase in membership and a large jump in income. Office space was expanded and additional staff was employed. No longer were CFFO's members mainly Dutch Calvinist in background; at least half of them came from other Christian traditions.<sup>17</sup>

Wherein lies the distinctive Christian character of the Christian Farmers Federations? The CFFs' founders shared with their Dutch neo-Calvinist forebears the rejection of the notion that the church was the prime Christian institution through which other institutions received their Christian character. The Christian character of an organization rested upon its principles. The CFFs' Christian character rests upon the principles found in the federations' constitutions, vision statements, and policy documents, as well as their institutional actions.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, CFFO's constitution was modified to make it more relevant to a Christian general farmers' organization in the Canadian context. The constitutional purpose of CFFO was "to promote and apply Christian ideas and principles

to the solution of agricultural problems and to promote the social and economic interests of its members in order to contribute to the solution of the problems of our society in a Christian spirit.” It seeks in the following ways to achieve this purpose: by “organizing...farmers”; “doing research, organizing discussions, publishing ideas, promoting justice, and engaging in whatever activities are conducive to increasing the knowledge of members with respect to their responsibilities” as Christian producers, marketers, and citizens; by “presenting the Christian voice” on farming and agriculture to other farmers’ organizations, the government, and the public at large; and “co-operating with other organizations who strive for similar goals by lawful means, provided we do not compromise our principles in so doing.” The Christian principles to be promoted and applied were explained in the “Basis” in CFFO’s revised constitution in 1978:

The organization is based on the conviction that the Holy Scriptures, as the infallible Word of God, are the supreme standard for all human life. Consequently, the organization pledges to uphold the following principles in its activities:

A. Farming, as all other human endeavor, is a response to God’s act of Creation. By God’s grace it is possible for us to respond obediently. Through the renewing power of Jesus Christ, farming can glorify God by the stewardly care of His creation.

B. God’s Word through the Holy Spirit sets norms for all areas of Life, and consequently also governs farming and the farming industry.

C. God has given the farmer the mandate of being a responsible producer for the peoples of the world.<sup>18</sup>

In 1987, CFFO produced a vision statement, a succinct formulation of its basic views for policy makers and others. It expanded on the notion that the farmer had a three-fold task as producer, marketer, and citizen. The statement was a blend of “entrepreneurial and co-operative” principles: “We see a role for each farmer to safeguard our foodland resource, to share in the development of appropriate technology and to protect the quality and diversity of plant and animal life...We see a role for public policy...to provide a policy framework for a stewardly and sustainable agriculture.”<sup>19</sup>

CFFA’s constitution was originally based on CFFO’s but was rewritten in the 1980s, partly to update its language. The revision begins: “Recognizing that all human activity is a reflection of values and religious commitment the Christian Farmers Federation attempts to base its work on the Word of God as revealed in the Bible.” Among the key “realities” recognized by CFFA in its constitution are the following: “God made people in His image with the mandate to serve God and the creation as stewards. This requires a loving care for the earth and all who live on it... As God’s children and stewards, we must work to restore creation and oppose injustice and evil wherever we find it.”<sup>21</sup> In the late 1980s, CFFA formulated a “long range vision for Canadian agriculture.” It expressed the federation’s long-standing emphasis on justice, compassion, and stewardship, referring to stewardship in terms that reflected an earthkeeping view.<sup>21</sup>

Both CFFs made policy submissions to government and other bodies on a wide variety of contemporary issues in agriculture and rural land-use. For example, in its long-range vision statement, CFFA outlined the basic policy principles formulated in its work

to that time: the need to protect prime farmland, to manage and conserve soils carefully, to care for farm animals to prevent avoidable suffering, to manage technological development critically in order to enhance the environment and people's livelihoods, to ensure a fair return to producers, to provide high quality and safe food for the consumer, to create a fair balance of trade and market opportunities among nations while enabling countries to meet their own requirements for basic food security, and to provide development assistance to the historically colonized and exploited nations, especially to their most disadvantaged citizens to give them access to and decision-making power over productive resources.<sup>22</sup>

Stewardship as a central Christian principle for agriculture was expressed in the CFFs' policy submissions in three main ways: as stewardship of the soil, family farm stewardship, and foodland stewardship. First, with regards to stewardship of the soil, the federations expressed concern about soil conservation well before other farmers' organizations did. In confronting issues of soil conservation, the CFFs began to develop their critique of modern industrializing agriculture and to take seriously the virtues of alternative agriculture. Due to differences within their memberships, however, no official position was taken on organic agriculture. Nevertheless, a significant minority of members practice ecological or low-input agriculture while many others have, for example, minimized their reliance on chemicals.<sup>23</sup>

The second way in which the principle of stewardship was expressed in the CFFs' policy activities was in terms of family farm stewardship. The family farm was viewed as the most stewardly structure for agriculture. Those who worked the land were assured a

stake in it and worked at a scale enabling a nurturing care for it. In the mid-1970s, CFFO staff member Elbert van Donkersgoed decided that an emphasis upon the family farm was the best way to bring a Christian influence to agriculture in Ontario and to resist a number of aspects of industrializing agriculture. CFFA policy took a similar line. The federations' membership was dominated by operators of medium-sized family farms, partly because of the form of farming practiced by most of its founders and early members but also because of the recognition of the social and economic virtues of the family farm. When considering a policy issue, whether it be free trade, government support for farmers, or marketing programs, CFF members and staff would always ask what effect it had on the family farm. They did not want to outlaw larger and more specialized operations but rather to ensure that such operations received no unfair advantages compared to the family enterprise.<sup>24</sup>

Thirdly, foodland stewardship meant the protection of Canada's scarce agricultural land from urban and industrial encroachment. CFFO's van Donkersgoed became probably the leading spokesperson on the issue in Ontario due to his concerted and consistent efforts in this area. CFFA was especially active on land-use planning matters in the period between 1974 and 1983. Of the forty major public submissions it made over this time, twenty-eight dealt directly with land-use issues. CFFA was a strong proponent of centralized land-use planning to preserve Alberta's best farmland, but its views were largely ignored. Between 1979 and 1988, CFFA made representations on four major urban annexation cases. It put forward proposals that enabled urban expansion to take place while preserving the best farmland. Only in one of these cases did CFFA have

some success. In general, rural planning decisions in the province were swayed by interests other than those represented by CFFA.<sup>25</sup>

How did other Canadian farmers view the CFFs? In 1986, in two parts of Alberta in which CFFA had a local association, I interviewed twenty-four farmers who were not members of CFFA. Many identified themselves as Christians; none were Dutch Calvinist in background. Eighteen had heard of the federation although eight of these reported they actually knew very little, if anything, about it. Many of the remaining ten had positive things to say, with three even expressing an interest in becoming members. One interviewee said, “Some of my neighbors are members. The organization originated mainly with Dutch people, but others have joined up since then. I’ve seen write-ups in the paper about it. I know they have public meetings now and then. They are working at saving agricultural land. I’m interested in it but haven’t got around to finding out more about it.” Eight interviewees associated CFFA closely with the Dutch Reformed immigrant community. Four of them expressed some negative views: that the Dutch Reformed did not work on Sunday, they tried to impose their religious beliefs on others, and they sent their children to separate schools.

The CFFs have operated like a number of other farmers’ organizations in Canada. They have members who usually belong to a local association that runs meetings on issues of agricultural interest. Local associations provide representatives to a provincial board who play an important role in policy formulation assisted by policy coordinators on their staff. Committees of the organization may also assist with policy formulation in specialist areas. Annual conferences featuring speakers and panels often focus on a contemporary issue. The

organization provides representatives on a wide range of provincial and federal agricultural commissions and committees. Furthermore, a number of CFF members are also active and hold leadership positions in a variety of other farm groups and producer organizations. Yet the CFFs are unique in Canada and probably in North America. In their institutional activities, the two organizations are contending with the forces of modernity, resisting the dominance of a secularization that would maintain a general farmers' organization was by nature not religious. As one farm journalist put it, those who believe that there are "watertight compartments" between farming, farm organization politics, and "Sunday morning religion" have great difficulties coming to terms with an organization like the Christian Farmers Federation.<sup>26</sup>

To what extent have the Christian Farmers Federations been able to draw on their religiously based mode of organization to resist modernizing forces in Canadian society and agriculture? When assessing the role of religion in a community's life, one should not ignore the significant independent influence of the natural environment and the structure of the social environment. Each is a medium for and constraint upon human activity. The CFFs are caught up in the mainstream of modern Canada in a way that a separatist Christian farming group, like the Old Order Amish, is not. The federations are institutions oriented toward transformational political action in agriculture, yet they must interact with and work alongside mainstream institutions such as other farmers' organizations, bureaucracies, and governments. The CFFs' aim to communicate the meaning and implications of Christian principles to these institutions and call them to respond positively to the norms of stewardship, justice, and compassion. Sometimes

compromises take place in CFF policy submissions, in the sense that what would be seen to be ideal may be set aside in order to gain some progress on the most important points or on what is practicable. The federations have gained a reputation for moderation and balance and for taking an independent stance on the basis of principle. One Alberta Department of Agriculture official has commented about CFFA: “On many occasions, [officials] in the public service have stated that CFF has taken a very balanced, moderate position on issues on which other organizations have expressed radical, or evidently self-interested, positions.... The issue of preserving agricultural land, an issue not related very directly to economic problems, was strongly pursued by CFF. Other organizations, I feel, have emphasized issues that would return more dollars to their membership.”<sup>27</sup>

A farm journalist wrote of CFFO: “The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario has earned an enviable reputation within farming, political and agribusiness circles. All of this reputation rests on the briefs and policy statements it has developed on current issues. This is somewhat different from other organizations, whose reputations rest on the personalities of some leaders, on internal controversies, on the services they provide or the power they wield... I recall working in Ottawa when H. A. (Bud) Olson became agriculture minister and when his press aide, Jim Rusk, drew my attention to CFFO briefs, commenting on the consistency of the logic and the compelling practicality of solutions proposed.”<sup>28</sup> At times, engaging with modernity looks less like a form of resistance than a form of accommodation; however, it can also be a form of effective witness to the efficacy of principled action.

Occasional controversies within the Federations have reflected different approaches

to economic and political issues. These might be conceptualized as differences between those members who have been less critical of aspects of modern Canadian thought and those who have sought to maintain a more critical perspective based on the transformational spirit of Dutch neo-Calvinism. Some members have not agreed with the federations' support for an active role for government in agriculture. They would rather rely more directly on the workings of a free market. CFFA's development education program was also controversial at times. For example, there was disagreement over providing aid to Nicaragua when that country had a socialist government. In the late 1980s, CFFA was unable to come to a clear policy position on Canadian free trade with the United States because of such differences. Around the same time, in discussions over the guiding principles to be applied in CFFA's long range vision statement, contention arose over whether to stay with the organization's traditional principles of justice, compassion, and stewardship or to add others such as freedom, opportunity, and responsibility, which reflect a more free-market orientation.<sup>29</sup>

In general, CFF members farm within the agricultural mainstream. Most members practice modern, industrial farming methods. They operate moderate-sized, capital intensive family farms. During in-depth interviews conducted with thirty-nine CFFA members in 1986, I found broad agreement on a range of policies as well as on a certain view of stewardship. The following is a synthesis of the meaning of stewardship articulated in those interviews. While not every interviewee mentioned all of the following elements, I believe that they would all agree with the whole statement:

The earth belongs to God and it is God who has given me a small part of it to use and take care of for what is really only a brief time in the earth's history. The

generation which comes after me should receive the land from me in as good condition as, if not better than, when I first received it. My task as a farmer is to produce food or fiber in a way that maintains the fertility of the land and does not deplete it. Plants and animals are also given to us to use for food and fiber, although we should pay attention to the comfort and well-being of animals. Whatever tools, methods or skills I use must be used responsibly and carefully, and not wastefully. The way I farm, how I treat other people with whom I deal, how my produce is marketed, should be characterized by fairness, compassion, and justice. Farming is a service to God and a service to other people whose interests are just as important, if not more important, than my own.<sup>30</sup>

Such a view reflects the transition from a dominion view of stewardship to a more earthkeeping view. Most took very seriously the notion consistent with the dominion perspective that a Christian farmer's task was primarily to produce food and fiber. However, the notion that accountability to God extends into the realm of production, not just consumption, is part of the earthkeeping view. A few of the interviewees also indicated that their view of stewardship contained a preparedness to refrain from development on the farm for the sake of the environment. The main difference in CFFA (and CFFO) over the meaning of stewardship concerned how far the farmer ought to go in resisting industrializing trends in agriculture. The mainstream character of the CFFs meant that, in their practical expression of stewardship, few members have experimented with radical alternatives. While a significant number actively resist some industrializing trends, they face powerful ideological and economic forces in doing so.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, the Christian Farmers Federations in Canada have gained significant credibility in the public arena as associations of farmers competent to address in a knowledgeable manner the agricultural issues of the day. The federations' influence has been significant in a number of areas of activity and policy, although it has been limited, as is the influence of any farmers' organization. Clearly, institutional organization has enabled the relatively small number of CFF members to have more influence and to articulate their transformational views. Perhaps the federations can best be conceptualized as institutional expressions of a marginal sub-cultural group of religious distinctiveness. In a pluralistic society like Canada, characterized nevertheless by the hegemony of secularism in public life, the federations function as centers of meaning stability and resistance for their members. For a number of Christians of Dutch Calvinist background, the CFFs are part of a small group of interrelated Christian social institutions that provide a stable and concrete expression of the reality of Christian meaning. For their members and supporters, they establish, legitimize and maintain the Christian worldview on which they were founded.

In 1993, the Dutch Christian Farmers and Gardeners Union (CBTB) celebrated its seventy-fifth jubilee and pledged itself to a future of continued service. In 1994, however, all three main farmers' organizations in the Netherlands decided that they would have greater political influence within the country and within the European Union if they amalgamated. Many within the CBTB also believed that there was less active opposition to Calvinism than in 1918 and that many of the reasons for the founding of the CBTB were no longer relevant. On 1 January 1995, the CBTB ceased to exist, even at the local

level. As a result, the CFFs in Canada remain the only active, distinctively Christian farmers' organizations within the neo-Calvinist tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Other paths resistant to modern agriculture exist which complement the CFFs-- paths that in a number of significant ways are on less intimate terms with modern society. The Amish and the Hutterites, for example, offer more radical separatist options, which have aspects that are increasingly appreciated by critics of modern agriculture. The path taken by the CFFs has been one of intimate yet critical engagement with modern society and its agriculture. Its inspiration and genius have largely derived from Dutch neo-Calvinism. This tradition of Christian social action has enabled the CFFs to articulate clearly their stance of resistance, despite the limitations of their practical achievements.<sup>33</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1. Michael Troughton, "Process and Response in the Industrialization of Agriculture," in The Effect of Modern Agriculture on Rural Development, ed. Gyorgy Enyedi and Ivan Volgyes (New York: Pergamon, 1982), 213 - 28; Jules Billard, "The Revolution in American Agriculture," National Geographic 137, no. 2 (February 1970): 147 - 85; Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture (New York: Avon, 1977); Wendell Berry, The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981); Michael Troughton, "Ecological Assessment of Modern Agriculture," in Limits to Rural Land Use, ed. Guy M. R. A. van Oort et al. (Wageningen, the Netherlands: Pudoc, 1991), 141 - 55; Peter Goering, Helena Norberg-Hodge, and John Page, From the Ground Up: Rethinking Industrial Agriculture (London: Zed, 1993).

2. The research reported in this article is from John Paterson, "Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship: The Practice of Agricultural Stewardship in the Christian Farmers Federations of Canada" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1998). A number of methods were used to gather the information for this study. I was given free access to the archives and files of the CFFs in both Alberta and Ontario, including extensive collections of newspaper and magazine articles about the groups. I was able to supplement these with information from the personal files of a number of CFF leaders in Alberta. I had access to the CFFs' newsletters and magazines. Each organization initially published its own magazine, Christian Farmer (CFFO) and Plow-Share (CFFA). Then, between 1985 and 1991, Earthkeeping was co-published as a

quarterly magazine. From 1991, each of the organizations produced only a newsletter, Earthkeeping Ontario or Earthkeeping Alberta. I also consulted the literature on Dutch neo-Calvinism and Dutch settlement in North America in the libraries of The King's University College in Edmonton and Calvin College in Grand Rapids. I conducted numerous interviews with CFF leaders and members, especially in Alberta. I am significantly indebted for information on the history of CFFO to Elbert van Donkersgoed, who has been on its staff since the early 1970s. I also conducted fieldwork over a number of years in the 1980s among CFF leaders and members in Alberta, which was updated in two return visits in the late 1990s. One set of semi-structured interviews in Alberta was with thirty-nine CFF members and twenty-four of their neighbors. During a visit to the Netherlands in 1997, I interviewed Jaap Vermaat, historian of the Dutch Calvinist farmers' movement.

3. In 1992, the Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta changed its name to Earthkeeping: Food and Agriculture in Christian Perspective, usually shortened to just Earthkeeping. The nature of Dutch neo-Calvinism is discussed below. Most current members of the Canadian CFFs are unaware of the organizations' historical links to the Dutch Calvinist farmers' union and that their social action strategy is that of Dutch neo-Calvinism. No explicit indication of this link exists in the constitution, literature or activities of the CFFs. There are also few, if any, explicit connections made to the other separate Christian organizations in Canada that have also been established by the Dutch neo-Calvinist migrant community. A significant proportion of the CFF membership, however, also belongs to the Christian Reformed Church, a denomination with its origin

in Dutch Calvinism. The federations owe their distinctive character to Dutch neo-Calvinism and it was Dutch neo-Calvinist farmers who founded them and ensured their survival in their early years and beyond. See also Lloyd Rand, “‘What Wilt Thou Lord That I Do?’ The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario: Neo-Calvinism, Agriculture and Ethnicity” (master’s thesis, Queen’s University, Kingston, 1994).

4. These four approaches to Christian social action have been discussed by H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1956); Reformed Ecumenical Synod, The Church and its Social Calling (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1980); Duncan Roper, Biblical Foundations for Radical Discipleship (Wellington, New Zealand: Foundation for Christian Studies, 1977); John A. Olthuis, “From Protest to Contribution” in Will All the King’s Men...Out of Concern for the Church, Phase II, ed. James H. Olthuis et al. (Toronto: Wedge, 1972), 223 - 55; Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton, The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984).

5. Justus Van der Kroef, “Abraham Kuyper and the Rise of Neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands,” Church History 17, no. 3 (September 1948): 316 - 34; Michael Fogarty, Christian Democracy in Western Europe, 1820 - 1953 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 246, 253; John Windmuller, Labor Relations in the Netherlands (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 49; Jaap Vermaat, “Het Begon met Ingezonden Brieven...” Ons Platteland, ? February 1989; Jaap Vermaat, “Welke Argumentum Speelden bij de Oprichting?” Ons Platteland, 17 February 1989. Abraham Kuyper’s address to the Christian Social Congress of 1891 has been published in English

translation twice, as Christianity and the Class Struggle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Piet Hein, 1950) and as The Problem of Poverty (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1991).

6. Fogarty, Christian Democracy in Western Europe, 59; Alan Robinson, Dutch Organised Agriculture in International Politics, 1945 - 1960 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 37, 55, 57 - 58; J. Frouws and J. Van Tatenhove, "Agriculture, Environment and the State: The Development of Agro-environmental Policy-making in the Netherlands," Sociologia Ruralis 33, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 220 - 39, see 223; Jaap Vermaat, "De Aansluiting bij de Landelijke Bond," Ons Platteland (? February 1989).

7. Evert W. Hofstee, Rural Life and Rural Welfare in the Netherlands (The Hague: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 1957); Frouws and Van Tatenhove, "Agriculture, Environment and the State," 222; W. Singh, Policy Development: A Study of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press, 1972).

8. W. Rip, Landbouw en Publiekrechtelijke Bedrijfsorganisatie (Wageningen, the Netherlands: Veenman and Zonen, 1952), 238 - 39; Reformed Ecumenical Synod, "Report on Separate Christian Organizations," Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, supplement no.2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1963), 92 - 155, see 107; Jonathon Chaplin, "Subsidiarity and Sphere Sovereignty: Catholic and Reformed Conceptions of the Role of the State," in Things Old and New: Catholic Social Teaching Revisited, ed. Francis P. McHugh and Samuel M. Natale (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993): 175 - 202.

9. Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, "The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of

Immigration: The Dutch in Alberta,” in Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity, ed. Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 143 - 73; Frans Schryer, The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class, and Dutch Ethnicity (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998); Aileen Van Ginkel, “Ethnicity in the Reformed Tradition: Dutch Calvinist Immigrants in Canada, 1946 - 1960” (master’s thesis, University of Toronto, 1982). Christian agricultural societies were established by Dutch Calvinist farmers in parts of the United States early in the twentieth century. See Robert Swierenga, “The Little White Church: Religion in Rural America,” Agricultural History 71 (Fall 1997): 415 - 41; Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 93 - 94, 112. They did not organize a farmers’ union, however, as the post-World War II migrants to Canada did, because they did not have firsthand experience of the full development of pillarization in the Netherlands, especially as it related to the sphere of labor and employers’ unions in the 1920s and 1930s.

10. This included the second largest Christian school system in Canada, after the Roman Catholic system; see Harro Van Brummelen, Telling the Next Generation: Educational Development in North American Calvinist Christian Schools (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986).

11. “Bestuursvergadering,” minutes of the Board meeting of the Woodstock Christian Farmers Association, 12 October 1953, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario files, Guelph, Canada (hereafter CFFO Files); Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 108 - 11.

12. Hilbert van Ankum (former CFFO Executive Secretary) to Elbert van Donkersgoed (CFFO Executive Director), March 1973, CFFO Files; “Huishoudelyk Reglement,” constitution of the Federation of Christian Farmers Associations, 1954, CFFO Files; Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 112 - 18.

13. Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Policy Handbook (Harriston, Canada: CFFO, 1983); Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, “Choosing Priorities in Agriculture: Annual Submission to the Ontario Minister of Agriculture and Food,” October 1985, CFFO Files; Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 153 - 68, 179 - 89.

14. David Tuininga, “Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta: Its Early History,” Plow-Share 9, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 12 - 13; Harry Kits, “Neo-Calvinist Involvement in Canada from 1945 - 1980: An Initial Sketch” (address delivered at the conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, Chicago, 1987); Jim Visser (CFFA President, 1974 - 1979), interview by author, Edmonton, Canada, 7 February 1985; David Tuininga (Neerlandia Local Secretary in early 1970s and CFFA Secretary in late 1970s), interview by author, Neerlandia, Canada, 18 February 1985; Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 203 - 14.

15. Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta, “Proposals on Land Use, Submitted to the Alberta Land Use Forum,” March 1975, Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta files, Edmonton, Canada (hereafter CFFA Files); Ted Koopmans and John Kolkman, “Signposts Toward Responsible Agriculture: Phase One--Background Issues Affecting

the Development/Under-development of Canadian Agriculture,” 1978, CFFA Files;  
Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 214 - 59.

16. Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 267 - 68,  
273 - 88; Earthkeeping Alberta (August 1992): 2; Vern Gleddie (CFFA President), to  
Friends of CFFA, 9 December 1992, CFFA Files; CFFA/Earthkeeping, “Annual Report,  
1993,” CFFA Files (“CFFA/Earthkeeping” will be used to refer to CFFA after its name  
change in 1992); Kathryn Olson, (Executive Director, CFFA/Earthkeeping), interview by  
author, Edmonton, Canada, 14 June 1997.

17. Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 192 - 97;  
“CFFO--Four Decades of Commitment and Stewardship,” insert to Earthkeeping Ontario  
(December 1994): 3; Elbert van Donkersgoed (CFFO Research and Policy Director),  
interview by author, Guelph, Canada, 29 April 1997.

18. Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, “Revised Constitution,” 1978, CFFO  
Files.

19. Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, “On the Canada-U.S. Free Trade  
Agreement: Submission to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Free Trade” 1987, CFFO  
Files.

20. Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta, “Constitution,” 1984, CFFA Files.

21. Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta, “Statement on a Long Range Vision  
for Canadian Agriculture,” 1990, CFFA Files.

22. Ibid.

23. Jim Visser, “The Farmer as Provider: Restoring Agriculture to Bless the

World,” Vanguard 7, no. 5 (1977): 8 - 11; Christian Farmers Federation, “Annual Report, 1982,” CFFA Files; Earthkeeping 7, no. 1 (March 1991); Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 186 - 92, 244 - 45.

24. Elbert van Donkersgoed, “Selling the Family Farm for Some Red Broth,” Christian Farmer 12, no. 3 (Winter 1979): 4 - 10; Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta, “Position Paper submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture on Bill C-25 (An Act to Amend the Agricultural Stabilization Act),” June 1985, CFFA Files; Elbert van Donkersgoed (CFFO Executive Director), interview by author, Guelph, Canada, 7 June 1985; Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 171 - 79, 260 - 65.

25. Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 182 - 6, 245 - 55. A discussion of CFFA’s approach to the Edmonton annexation case of 1979 - 1981 may also be found in Harry Spaling and John R. Wood, “Greed, Need or Creed? Farmland Ethics in the Rural-Urban Fringe,” Land Use Policy 15, no. 2 (April 1998): 105 - 18.

26. Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 167 - 68, 218 - 20; Jim Romahn, “CFFO: Moderate and Attractive, But...,” Earthkeeping 1, no. 1 (February 1985): 8.

27. Fred Schuld, “CFFA: A Moderate Balanced Alternative,” Earthkeeping 1, no. 1 (February 1985): 6.

28. Romahn, “CFFO: Moderate and Attractive, But...,” 8

29. Development Education Committee, Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta,

“For Discussion: An Update for CFFA’s Position on Development Education,” July 1985, CFFA Files; Minutes of CFFA Provincial Board meeting, 24 June 1987, CFFA Files; Minutes of CFFA Ad Hoc Long Range Vision Committee, 14 December 1988, CFFA Files; Vern Gleddie, “Seeking Reaffirmation of Purpose: CFFA Convention,” Earthkeeping, 5, no. 1 (February 1989): 18 - 19; Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 268 - 73.

30. Paterson, “Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship,” 305.

31. Ibid., 364 - 67, 386 - 89.

32. Ibid., 86 - 87; Jaap Vermaat (author of the history of the CBTB 1948 - 1993, former employee of CBTB in the 1950s), interviews by author, Bennekom, the Netherlands, 3 and 4 June 1997; Peter Biesheuvel (member of Dutch Second Chamber of Parliament, former employee of CBTB, 1974 - 1981), interview by author, The Hague, the Netherlands, 3 June 1997. The history of the CBTB has been examined in Christelijke Boeren en Tuindersbond, Gedenkboek 1918 - 1948 (The Hague, the Netherlands: Druk ten Hagen, 1948), and Jaap Vermaat, Grote en Kleine Euvelen (Amsterdam, the Netherlands: VU Uitgeverij, 1994).

33. John Bennett, Hutterian Brethren: The Agricultural Economy and Social Organization of a Communal People (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); John Ryan, The Agricultural Economy of Manitoba Hutterite Colonies (Toronto, Canada: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Berry, Gift of Good Land, 216 - 26, 249 - 63; Marc A. Olshan, “The Old Order Amish as a Model for Development” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1980).