

Molly Kokesh  
Civitas Essay  
Dr. Jeffrey Miller  
May 1, 2013

### Keeping Tabs on a Costly Deputy

*CIVITAS* means *citizenship*: the position of inhabiting a given place and exercising its inherent rights, privileges, and responsibilities (Augustana College).<sup>1</sup> In broad terms, my senior government thesis paper “Exploring “waste reduction” techniques in sustainable development policy: *A case study of Sioux Falls, SD*” examines our ecological *place* and the inherent rights, privileges, and responsibilities that stem from living on Earth. Humans depend on Earth’s resources for survival, yet our overconsumption of these resources is damaging to our place and its inhabitants. Policies like the Sustainability Master Plan (SMP) of the Sioux Falls Public Works Environmental Division (PWED) are government attempts to help a community of people live on Earth in a way that makes sense socially, economically, and environmentally—to live, by their definition, “responsibly.”

Keeping a watchful eye on the effectiveness of our government is essential to being a responsible citizen. My research concludes the Waste Minimization section (WMS) of the SMP does not accomplish its goals of environmental stewardship. The WMS does not contain measures to bring about *waste reduction*, which results in a failure to carry out the plan’s larger mission to “wisely use resources,” compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.<sup>1</sup> These shortcomings not only prevent the PWED from carrying out its own mission, but also demonstrate irresponsibility the way Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a central pillar of *CIVITAS*, understands it. As a citizen called to care for our natural environment, my senior thesis is an attempt to respond to the “whole of reality” (Bonhoeffer, 226) that is our ecological place.

---

<sup>1</sup> Definition of “sustainability” according to Gro Harlem Brundtland

## Deputyship

*“The fact that responsibility is fundamentally a matter of deputyship is demonstrated most clearly in those circumstances in which a man is directly obliged to act in the place of other men, for example ... as a statesman” (194).*

Bonhoeffer uses the analogy of a father, teacher, or *statesman* to explain his understanding of responsibility for the individual—the combining in one self “the selves of a number of human beings” (194). His use of the analogy points to an expectation that such deputies—fathers, teachers, or statesmen—demonstrate responsibility especially well to serve as examples for individuals for whom the role of deputyship is less obvious. The PWED is a deputy “committed to providing leadership in environmental management” and is charged by the City “to protect and enhance the Sioux Falls environment through management of responsible and reasonable local codes, standards, and programs” (City Website). The PWED fails to carry out its mission in the WMS and likewise to act as a deputy for its citizens. The failure of any community to address the problem of the overconsumption of resources is irresponsible; Sioux Falls is no exception.

## Responsibility

*“‘Responsibility for a thing’ does not mean its utilization for man and consequently the abuse of its essential nature, but it means the essential directing of it towards man (197).*

The responsibility to consume resources wisely is supported by the work of Bonhoeffer who defines responsibility as acting “in accordance with reality” and the fulfilled will of God (198). Understanding what *is* in accordance with reality and in accordance with the fulfilled will of God is the most difficult part of acting responsibly. For Bonhoeffer, humans cannot know good and evil, therefore determining the will of God is done by studying the model of Jesus Christ and assessing the needs of one’s neighbor.

Scripture says Jesus often spent time in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1-11, Mark 1:9-13, Mark 1: 35, Luke 5: 16). He went into the wilderness for intimate conversation with God and to reveal important things to his closest friends. Scripture also explains:

(1) God created all things,

*John 1: 3. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

(2) God uses Nature to teach and connect with humans, and

*Job 12:7-10. But ask the animals, and they will teach you; or birds of the air and they will tell you; or speak to the earth and it will teach you; or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the lord has done this. In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.*

(3) all things belong to God; humans do not have dominion over Creation.

*Lev. 25:23-24. The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.*

Therefore, it follows from scripture and Jesus' example that humans are responsible for maintaining our ecological place, or at least not destroying it.

For Bonhoeffer, people must remain the focus of responsible action: "responsibility ... is essentially a relation of man to man" and "the highest values must be subservient to man" (196). Caring for things and ideas, such as environmental stewardship, is right as long as it is "directed towards mankind as it was in the Creation" (196). Our concern for the well being of the natural environment should come second to our concern for the well being of humans. However, in the case of depleting resources and climate change, the well being of humans is contingent on the well being of the natural environment (as is well documented in biology and ecology research). Our actions must accord with the reality that our ecological place is limited in the resources humans need for survival.

My thesis paper shows the WMS of the SMP is a failure of the Sioux Falls PWED to act responsibly. The WMS intends to divert *and* reduce waste, a combination suited to reduce the strain on nonrenewable resources (and so accord with reality), but by conflating the terms *waste reduction* and *waste diversion* the WMS addresses only the latter. Creating policy that looks but does not act the part is irresponsible. As environmentalism becomes increasingly popular, citizens need to assess the impact of sustainability policy in absolute terms, not merely accept that “sustainability policy” creates a more sustainable city.

### Pertinence

*“[T]hat attitude to things is pertinent which keeps steadily in view their original, essential and purposive relation to God and to men” (205).*

Environmentalism is trendy. In his 2011 Seattle Times Op-Ed, “How the rise of trendy environmentalism is harming the planet,” Todd Myers explains how “environmentalism” is increasingly used for social and financial reward without regard for its effect on the planet. The problem, Myers says, is that “[t]oo many of today's environmental policies are designed primarily to create a green image — not to deliver environmental results” (Myers)<sup>ii</sup> The WMS is effectually one such “green image” legislation. The policy looks and sounds environmentally conscious, but does not reduce resource consumption as it ought.

What Myers demands of environmentalism hardly differs from Bonhoeffer’s description of pertinence: “The greater the purity of the service to a cause or to a thing, and the more completely this service is free from personal subsidiary aims, the more thoroughly the thing itself will recover its original relation to God and to man...” (205). Bonhoeffer continues the description of pertinence, the responsible treatment of a thing, by adding a second rule: “there is inherent in every thing its own law of being,” and he adds “no statesman can disregard any one

of these laws and conventions with impunity” (206-207). The SMP breaks both rules: it is not enacted out of pure service to the cause and ignores the laws inherent in Nature. The WMS is soft legislation. It is “green enough” to mirror legislation in other cities—to show Sioux Falls is forward thinking—but neglects to address the real issue of overconsumption. The WMS penalizes waste haulers instead of citizens for collecting too much garbage. Instead of decreasing the number of garbage hauling licenses it gives out each year, the City implements a slow and painful process to eliminate a few haulers over the course of three or four years (while 30+ haulers serve 250,000 people). The WMS also ignores the laws of declining nonrenewable resources inherent in our ecological place. In breaking Bonhoeffer’s rules of pertinence, the WMS loses sight of the “original, essential, purposive relation [our natural environment has] to God and to men” (205).

### Vocation

*“Vocation is responsibility and responsibility is a total response of the whole man to the whole of reality; for this very reason there can be no petty and pedantic restricting of one’s interests to one’s professional duties in the narrowest sense” (225-226).*

I am uncertain of the path my life ought to take after graduation in almost all aspects—career, location, further education, and personal relationships. However, I know my vocation includes a call to be a voice and caretaker for the natural environment. I grew up near to nature and there found God. I learned about His love and compassion by watching my parents work, intercede, fight, and suffer (194) for the animals and plants both in their care on our farm, and those they happened to encounter. God has consistently called my attention to the struggle of the “[natural] world to remain the [natural] world” (202). I am willing and eager to “devote earnest thought to the consequences of [my] action” (226) on the environment and consequences of the action of my community.

My senior thesis is my first attempt at examining the consequences of the inaction of my government on the environment. The WMS is a good first step to improve waste management in Sioux Falls, but the PWED needs to do better. The goals of the WMS will not be brought to fruition given the current strategies of the plan. After completing my thesis, my vocation is clear: whether I enter public policy, law, the nonprofit sector, business, education or elsewhere, what I do must be consistent with an intimate understanding of my ecological place and its inherent rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Stefan Heuser describes it well when he writes, “[Bonhoeffer’s] political ethics is about finding out in personal encounter with others, with the worldly reality, with law and with God’s will, what to do and how to co-operate” (Heuser, 68). My vocation is to seek ways to help my community best co-operate with and within our ecological place.

## Works Cited

---

"Augustana College." *Civitas-Frequently Asked Questions*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Apr. 2013.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Ethics*. Ed. Eberhard Bethge. New York: Macmillan, 1955.

Heuser, Stefan. "The Cost of Citizenship: Disciple and Citizen in Bonhoeffer's Political Ethics." *Sagepub*. N.p., 25 Nov. 2005. Web. 27 Apr. 2013. .

Myers, Todd. "Editorials / Opinion." *The Seattle Times*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.  
<[http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2016094849\\_guest06myers.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2016094849_guest06myers.html)>.