

Act doesn't measure up in equality

Last month in Philadelphia, a federal appeals court did its bit for efforts to make Christian conscience knuckle under to the LGBTQ agenda. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit held that the city was within its rights in barring Catholic Social Services of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and an agency called Bethany Christian Services from making foster care placements because they won't place children with same-sex couples.

Up to then, Catholic Social Services had served an average of 120 children in 100 foster homes daily. The agency's attorney said the ruling meant the city now was free to "place politics above the needs of kids and the rights of parents."

Perhaps so. But Philadelphia isn't alone. In recent years, religiously sponsored social services have been forced out of adoption and foster care in similar circumstances in places that include Massachusetts, Illinois, California and the District of Columbia.

Nor are these isolated incidents, limited to adoption and foster care. They are skirmishes in a broader, ongoing fight, pressed by groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and the Human Rights Campaign, to advance the ideology of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" at the expense of religious groups, private institutions and individuals who object in conscience.

The steamroller appeared to inch ahead in April in the Supreme Court when the justices agreed to consider three cases – two involving homosexual men and one a transgender woman – who seek to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the understanding of "sex" among the categories covered by the

Civil Rights Act of 1964. The cases will be argued next fall, with a decision likely early next year.

Human Rights Campaign legal director Sarah Warbelow welcomed the court's action in accepting the cases. At the same time, however, she urged Congress to move ahead on legislation called the Equality Act, which would confer protected status on LGBTQ persons, not only under the Civil Rights Act but under a wide range of federal laws and programs involving employment, housing, public accommodations, education, federal funding, credit and the jury system.

Some 20 states already have such laws, which have been used, for example, against florists and bakers who refuse for reasons of conscience to provide services for same-sex weddings. The legislation traces its origins back to the 1970s, when an earlier version was sponsored by New York Reps. Bella Abzug and Ed Koch. In its present form, it has extensive corporate backing, including support from companies such as Apple, Twitter, Amazon, Google and Facebook.

But it also has opposition, including from feminists and women athletes who say letting transgender women with the bodies of men compete in women's events would be the death of women's sports.

Five bishops who chair committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops expressed regret at the May 17 passage of the legislation in the House of Representatives by a vote of 236-173, with all Democrats joined by eight Republicans voting in favor. The bishops said it would "negatively impact" the unborn, health care, schools, religious liberty and parental rights.

The Equality Act now goes to the Senate, where it is not expected to pass. But, face it, with the support of media and many politicians, LGBTQ activists occupy the high ground in the long term, not least because it's hard to fight coercion

that shelters under the banner of "equality." One is reminded of a famous line in George Orwell's savage parody of communism, "Animal Farm": "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Russell Shaw is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.