"Discrimination" Case is Religious Freedom Fight

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has sued Rick and Paul Desilets, owners of an apartment building in Turners Falls, for daring to live up to the demands of their conscience. Because the Desilets are devout Catholics who believe that sex outside of marriage is sinful, they refused to rent one of their apartments to an unmarried couple.

The Massachusetts attorney general's office sued the Desilets, claiming they violated a state law prohibiting housing discrimination based on marital status. The Desilets argue that forcing them to rent to an unmar- ried couple would infringe their constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.

The plight of the Desilets was the subject of a March 15 *Chicago Sun Times* column by George Will as well as a March 22 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal.* As Will made clear, the Desilets are not trying to force their religious beliefs on anyone; the state is trying to force contemporary sexual values on them. "The state," wrote Will, "suggests that this case concerns mere commercial behavior, and that the 'free exercise of religion' extends only to rituals and services." The Desilets, on the other hand, "believe the exercise of their religion must involve striving to be obedient to God in every aspect of their lives."

The *Journal* editorial pointed out the double standard which exists in this country. Atheists, the *Journal* noted, have been tenacious and successful in their pursuit of a public square which is devoid of religion, while religious people are exposed to anti-religious secular humanist views in many contexts, for example, the classroom.

"It will be interesting to see if the Massachusetts court recognizes that allowing a non-Christian to view a creche on Main Street is far less intrusive than forcing a Catholic to take into his own building a couple whose behavior is deeply offensive to him," the Journal said. The Catholic League has joined a coalition in filing a friend of the court brief in support of the Desilets. — *NJG*