



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on November 4, 2009

## EU Says No Crucifixes in Italian Schools

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the traditional display of crucifixes in Italian classrooms violates the rights of parents and children.

The mother who brought the case to the European Court actually won financial compensation for the supposed harm done to her children who had to endure gazing upon the religious symbols.

A law dating back to 1920 that requires a crucifix to be hung in every classroom upset Soile Lautsi, the Italian mother who filed the suit. Even though Italy reached an agreement with the Vatican in 1984 to stop considering Catholicism as the state religion, the crucifix law was never repealed.



Lautsi could not accept the presence of a crucifix in every room because she wants her children to receive an absolutely secular education. After she complained to the EU Court, the Court ruled that the crucifixes must go and awarded Lautsi 5,000 euros (\$7,400) in damages.

“The compulsory display of a symbol of a given confession in premises used by the public authorities ... restricted the right of parents to educate their children in conformity with their convictions,” the seven-judge EU panel said. Additionally, the “right of children to believe or not to believe” was also somehow restricted by the presence of the crucifixes.

Many Italian politicians have understandably reacted with anger at the European Court’s intrusion into Italy’s internal affairs. Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini called the crucifix a “symbol of our tradition,” not a mark of Catholicism. One government minister decried the ruling as “shameful”; another recognized that Europe was losing its Christian heritage.

The Italian government intends to appeal the EU decision. The Vatican is studying the ruling before releasing a statement about it.

The bias against anything Christian is pronounced. Conservatives have complained about schools refusing to perform nativity plays because it might upset Muslim children.

One wonders how the mere presence of a religious symbol in classrooms can somehow interfere with the “right of children to believe or not to believe.” The EU Court must believe that the crucifix has mystical powers of hypnotic mind control.

Perhaps the judges recognize that the crucifix might cause someone to think about why Jesus Christ would go to such great lengths to express his love for humanity. They certainly wouldn’t want to risk anyone considering Jesus in a favorable light.

How can the EU Court be called a “court of human rights” when it tramples on the right to express religious beliefs? The judges could just have easily gone the opposite direction, ruling that religious



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students should be allowed to bring any symbols of their choice to school while children of nonbelievers could bring a copy of Darwin's works or nothing at all. That might even foster dialogue and understanding between those of different faiths and those who don't believe.

Instead, the EU Court puts the government in the position of being openly hostile to religion, not neutral. Even this hostility is selective, allowing Christian holiday celebrations to be squelched so as not to offend Muslims.

Such is the price of surrendering national sovereignty to international bodies. The United States should take a lesson from this and extricate itself from such agreements as NAFTA, the FTAA, and the Security and Prosperity Partnership. The European Union began as such a trade agreement and evolved into international governance; the United States must not follow the pattern set by Europe.

The other wisdom to be gained from Italy's dilemma is that control of education by a central government can institutionalize hostility toward religion just as easily as it can establish a state religion. The danger lies in the central control, since it enables a single parent like Soile Lautsi to set a precedent for an entire nation.

If Lautsi's only recourse had been to go before a local school board to plead her case, the wishes of the entire community would have had a chance of prevailing, whether those wishes coincided with hers or not. And if she had won her case, at least it would not result in a blanket condemnation of religion across an entire nation.

When bodies of international governance and central national governments take over the education of children, the persecution of religion that results can be excruciating.



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