

Disappointment from the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy
for the ruling by the European Court in Strasbourg.

« This is a decision aiming not to fully form a “stato laico”.

For Protestants crucifixes do not refer to a common Italian heritage or culture,
but are the legacy of a society dominated by Roman Catholic culture.»

Following the publication of the ruling by the European Court in Strasbourg on the case “Lautsi vs. Italy” regarding the presence of the crucifix in classrooms, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy released this statement:

« FCEI regrets that the “Italian case” has once again been an opportunity for exceptional provisions, aiming not to fully form a non-religious state (“Stato laico”), where all may be included, without any discrimination of religious or non-religious belief (Constitution of the Italian Republic, art.3).
Crucifixes will continue to be present in classrooms and law courts, but for minorities that received civil rights and religious freedom some 150 years ago – and Protestant Churches are among them – these crucifixes will not refer to a common Italian heritage or culture.
On the contrary these will appear to be – as they really are – the legacy of a society dominated by Roman Catholic culture and symbols. Even though, in our ecumenical dialogue, we acknowledge that the best part of the Roman Catholic Church aims to contribute to build a multi-religious and inter-cultural society, we invite everyone to further the dialogue on matters of secularism (“laicità”), with particular reference to pluralism in state-run schools.»

The Court ruling, among other things, states: « The Court found that, while the crucifix was above all a religious symbol, there was no evidence before the Court that the display of such a symbol on classroom walls might have an influence on pupils. Furthermore, whilst it was nonetheless understandable that the first applicant might see in the display of crucifixes in the classrooms of the State school formerly attended by her children a lack of respect on the State’s part for her right to ensure their education and teaching in conformity with her own philosophical convictions, her subjective perception was not sufficient to establish a breach of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1. »

Moreover, « the Court considered that it was not for it to take a position regarding a domestic debate among domestic courts », since in Italy «the Italian Consiglio di Stato and the Court of Cassation had diverging views on the meaning of the crucifix and that the Constitutional Court had not given a ruling.».

With this decision the Grand Chamber of the Strasbourg Court, by great majority (15 judges against 2) overturned the first degree unanimous ruling (by 7 judges) of 3rd November 2009.