

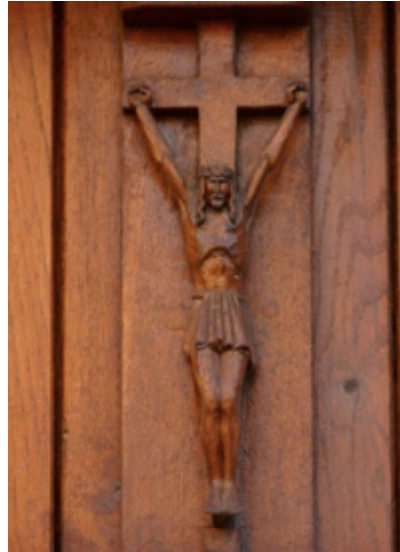


Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on November 19, 2009

Italy Crusades for the Cross

The mayors of several Italian cities are rebelling against a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling that bans the crucifix from public classrooms. The ECHR found that the display of crucifixes in state schools is a “violation of the right to education taken jointly with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

In response to the ruling, Mayor Vittorio Gatti of Besana in the Brianza Province has ordered the schools in his city to display crucifixes in all classrooms within the next week or face a fine of 150 euros. The [ordinance](#) posted on the city’s Web page cites a number of national and local rulings that run contrary to the ECHR judgment and points out the Italian government has filed an appeal with the ECHR. It defends public display of the crucifix as a “symbol to express the high ground of civic values, which are also the values that delineate the secularity of the law of the State,” quoting an earlier state court ruling.



Primary school officials in Priverno, Italy, face an even larger fine of 500 euros if they do not comply with a similar order issued by that city’s mayor. According to the Italian news outlet [Leggo](#), Umberto Macci, mayor of that town in the Latina province, used local regulations established in 1924 and 1927 to uphold his order that all primary school classrooms have crucifixes displayed. Macci stated the religious icon is “an expression of fundamental Italian civic and cultural values.”

Mayor Guido Castelli of Ascoli in the Piceno Province is also defending the crucifix in schools, according to the Leggo report. He ordered schools in his city to ignore the ECHR sentence until the Italian government’s appeal is heard. Castelli referred to the ECHR ruling as foolish and said the crucifix represents “religious values of the Republican Constitution: freedom, mutual respect, enhancement of the individual, solidarity and the rejection of any discrimination.”

The mayor of Galzigano Terma in the Province of Padova, Riccardo Roman, has taken the matter even further by ordering the crucifix displayed in all public buildings, with a fine of 500 euros for non-compliance. His [ordinance](#) reads, “the crucifix in schools does not affect the dignity of anyone but represents the history, culture and values of our nation.”

Other European leaders are equally incensed by the ECHR ruling. [Fox News](#) reports that Poland’s president, Lech Kaczynski, as well as former president Lech Walesa, have both joined the Vatican in publicly denouncing the ban. The Greek Orthodox Church also opposes the ban, fearing it could set a precedent for public display of all religious symbols. The BBC reports that Archbishop Ieronymos, head



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of the Greek Orthodox Church, has called an emergency Holy Synod to determine the proper course of action to take. Yet there are supporters of the ban in Europe. The [BBC](#) also reported that Helsinki Monitor, a human rights group, is using the ECHR ruling to urge removal of all religious symbols in schools.

Judgments of the ECHR are binding on all members of the European Convention on Human Rights, including Italy, Greece and Poland. The [ECHR](#) was established in 1959 under the auspices of the Council of Europe, an international organization established after World War II in an effort to integrate European governments. This latest ruling came about in response to a complaint filed by Soile Lautsi, a mother who was offended by the presence of crucifixes in her two children's state school classrooms.

Missing in the debate is mention of the rights of God over those of His creatures. But the United States should at least heed the lesson it conveys as our officials head toward integration with Canada and Mexico into a [North American Union](#) and strengthening of the [United Nations](#).

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