

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **The Court on Human Rights of the European Union in Strasburg rules: “no crucifix in class”**

#### **The ruling was greeted favorably by Domenico Maselli, President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy**

Rome, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (NEV-PR81) - With its ruling on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November the European Court on Human Rights of Strasburg affirmed that “the obligatory exposition of a symbol of a given confession in places that are used by public authorities, and especially in schools, limits the right of parents to educate their children in conformity with their own believes”.

The ruling – welcomed favorably by Italian Protestants, as Domenico Maselli, President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) assures – originates from a claim of an Italian citizen of Finnish origin, Soile Lautsi, that in the school year of 2001/2002 protested against the presence of the crucifix in the classroom of her children.

In particular, the Court unanimously established that “the exposition of the crucifix in classrooms of public schools is contrary to the rights of parents to educate their children according to their own religious conceptions and the right of the students to freedom of religion”. “The presence of the crucifix, that cannot go unnoticed in the school rooms – states the ruling of the judges of Strasburg – could easily be interpreted by the students of all ages as a religious symbol, that would make them aware therefore of being educated in an environment that has the brand of a given religion”. All this, they continue, “could be encouraging for the religious students, but annoying to the children that practice other religions, in particular if they belong to religious minorities, or if they are atheists”.

Anticipating the typical argument with which the crucifix in the classrooms is defended in Italy – for that matter not always present – the European Court affirmed that it does not understand how “the exposition in the classrooms of the state schools of a symbol that could be reasonably associated with Catholicism could serve educational pluralism that is essential for the conservation of a 'democratic society' just as has been conceived by the Convention (European Convention of Human Rights), a pluralism that is acknowledged by the Italian Constitutional Court”.

“After the polemical debate on credits for those who choose the teaching of the Catholic religion in the public schools, and after that on 'the teaching of Islam', now explodes the clamorous case of the crucifix - stressed the President of the FCEI Maselli -. A ruling that we view favorably because it repeats the idea that the freedom of religion and respect for all faiths are at the basis of a peaceful and civil Europe”.

The first reaction of the Minister of Public Education Mariastella Gelmini was very clear. According to her “no one, not even some ideological European court, will be able to cancel our identity”. “Those who see in the ruling the negation of Christian roots in Europe – commented President Maselli - show that they do not appreciate the great merit that Christianity has in opening the doors to liberty for every man and every woman”.