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Italian ruling stirs religious controversy

JTA (13.08.2009) / HRWF (14.08.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - An Italian court ruling that public high school students may no longer receive academic credit for studying Catholicism has stirred controversy.

The ruling Wednesday by the Administrative Tribunal in Lazio, the district where Rome is located, came in response to an appeal by 24 secular and non-Catholic groups, including the Union of Italian Jewish Communities. It reversed a policy instituted in 2007 and also limited the role of Catholicism teachers in grading students in their final exams.

Italian public schools offer optional "religion hours" in which students may study the Catholic religion or other faiths, but under the 2007 ruling only students taking Catholicism were able to receive academic credit.

Church leaders and center-right politicians, including the education minister, sharply attacked the ruling.

Union of Italian Jewish Communities President Renzo Gattegna, however, urged that the ruling be accepted "calmly" and praised it for re-establishing "the full observance of constitutional principles."
