

RECOGNITION OF ECCLESIASTICAL TITLES IN ITALY: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR FREE MOVEMENT AND SPENDABILITY IS COMPLETED

In the Official Gazette of March 25, 2024, the Decree of the Ministry of Universities and Research dated February 9, 2024 was published showing the Table of Correspondence between Italian academic degrees and those of the Holy See, in implementation of the Agreement signed on February 13, 2019, between the Italian Republic and the Holy See for the application of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of University Level Degrees in the European Region. The Ministerial Decree completes a long path that has led to the recognition of ecclesiastical degrees, not only in theological disciplines (or related to them) but also in other academic disciplines, overcoming the distinctions that have existed until now and providing clear and transparent procedures for recognition. This means all those degrees awarded by universities, faculties and other institutions of higher ecclesiastical studies canonically erected or approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education that enjoy the right to confer academic degrees by authority of the Holy See (CIC, cann. 815 - 821).

Starting from what was established on the subject in Art. 10 no. 2 of the Villa Madama Agreement of 1984 and considering the Presidential Decree of February 2, 1994, no. 175, on the approval of the Italy-Saint See agreement for the recognition of pontifical academic degrees as well as the Lisbon Convention - and subsequent implementing acts - of April 11, 1997 on the circulation of academic degrees, and without prejudice to the provisions on the teaching autonomy of Italian universities, the Decree aims to fully implement the concordat and international commitment to collaboration and exchange between the academic institutions of the various countries and, specifically, the 2019 agreement, which also provided for the drafting, with periodic updating, of tables of correspondence between academic degrees in the ecclesial and Italian systems. In addition, the Decree recognizes the Catholic Church's commitment to the updating of ecclesiastical studies, initiated first with the reform of studies in the religious sciences and then in all other disciplines taught in ecclesiastical academic institutions for the general adaptation of pathways to European and international provisions on higher education as well as is implemented in Italy «un livello più avanzato di pluralismo culturale ed accademico (art. 9 Cost.) ed anche una più ampia tutela del diritto di libertà religiosa (art. 19 Cost.), di cui il riconoscimento dei titoli accademici nelle discipline ecclesiastiche rappresenta una specifica attuazione» (PAOLO CAVANA, *La nuova Intesa per il riconoscimento dei titoli accademici pontifici in discipline ecclesiastiche*, in *Quaderni di diritto e politica ecclesiastica*, 2/2020, p. 477; Cfr. anche VINCENZO PACILLO, *Sul riconoscimento dei titoli*

accademici ecclesiastici in Italia: prospettive di riforma dopo Veritatis Gaudium, in *Logos. Rivista politico-culturale*, 19 december 2018, available on the web).

As a result, the 2019 Agreement established the correspondence of degrees by level, so that Bachelor's degrees awarded by Italian higher education institutions were recognized by the Agreement corresponding to Baccalaureate degrees awarded by the Holy See's higher education institutions; Master's degrees to Licentiate degrees awarded by the Holy See's higher education institutions; and Doctoral degrees awarded in Italy corresponding to ecclesiastical Doctoral degrees. It was also aimed at the recognition of periods of study carried out in the Institutions of the two systems or academic exchanges, favoring access to the studies of the next level in possession of a lower level degree subject to correspondence in the other system.

The February 2019 Agreement had been followed by Presidential Decree No. 63 of May 27, 2019, which gave full and complete execution to the exchange of Note Verbales that took place between the Embassy of Italy to the Holy See and the Secretariat of State - Section for Relations with States about the recognition of academic degrees conferred by faculties approved by the Holy See. Specifically, the Note Verbale aimed to supplement the list of ecclesiastical disciplines, updating the procedures for the recognition of the relevant ecclesiastical academic degrees. As a result, it was established that in addition to theology (as already established in 1984) and sacred scripture (as integrated in 1994), canon law, liturgy, spirituality, missiology and religious sciences were to be considered as "recognized" ecclesiastical disciplines, pursuant to and for the purposes of the Villa Madama Agreement of Feb. 18, 1984. As a result, first (baccalaureate) and second (licentiate) level academic degrees awarded by pontifical universities in the aforementioned disciplines subject to expansion are recognized, at the request of the interested parties, as a degree and master's degree, respectively, in the Italian system, provided that the curriculum of study has allowed at least 180 formative credits to accrue for the degree and at least 120 formative credits for the master's degree.

The ministerial decree of 2024 completes the path of degree correspondence recognition, extending to degrees awarded by ecclesiastical academic institutions in disciplines not strictly theological, right a table of correspondence of first- and second-cycle degrees attached to the decree and subject to verification of the learning outcomes achieved, as described in the table. This correspondence between the Holy See and Italian systems is made in order to allow access to higher education, the pursuit of academic studies and the attainment of academic degrees in the respective Institutions of Higher Education. The table has a merely comparative purpose and does not determine any formal recognition, an element that remains delegated to the Institutions of Higher Education and those designated by law for the purpose of carrying out these procedures (as established by

Presidential Decree No. 189 of July 30, 2009). However, in order to facilitate such recognition procedures, for the purpose of verifying the authenticity of academic documentation, Italian higher education institutions will be able to make use of the tools and documentation produced by the Center for Information on Mobility and Academic Equivalences (CIMEA). For the procedures and criteria for the recognition of doctoral degrees, on the other hand, the recognition procedure set forth in Legislative Decree 165/2001 and Law 148/2002 remains firm, as clarified in the 2024 decree. It is, moreover, provided that Italian university institutions will be able to sign special agreements for the purpose of the double or joint issuance of their academic degrees with institutions of the Holy See. Thus, according to the table of correspondence, the Baccalaureate in Science of Education and Formation obtained in one of the identified pontifical academic institutions will correspond, upon verification of the learning outcomes achieved, to the Degree in Science of Education and Formation (L19); the Licentiate in Ecclesiastical Pedagogical Sciences will correspond to the Master's Degree in Pedagogical Sciences (LM85); the Baccalaureate and Licentiate in Philosophy will correspond to the Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy (L05) and the Master's Degree in Philosophical Sciences (LM78); the Licentiate in Christian and Classical Letters will correspond to the Master's Degree in Philology, Literature and History of Antiquity (LM15); the Licentiate in Church Cultural Heritage will correspond to the Master's Degree in Art History (LM89); the Licentiate in Social Communication will correspond to the Master's Degree in Communication Theory (LM92); and the Licentiate in Arabic and Islamic Studies will correspond to the Master's Degree in African and Asian Languages and Literatures (LM36)...

The Decree aims, therefore, at fostering the full realization of the right to study, of that to the recognition of qualifications, to diversity as a value because of the diversification of educational systems in the European region reflecting its cultural and religious heterogeneity, facilitating cultural exchanges and access to educational resources of other systems and encouraging mobility and also broadening the prospects of expendability of ecclesiastical training and, therefore, employment. A commitment that, for the Catholic Church and its institutions spread throughout the world, also means a commitment to further raising the quality of educational offerings, aiming to facilitate interdisciplinarity and collaboration. promoting an integral and organic formation and guaranteeing freedom of research and teaching.

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