

Statement by Professor Martin M. Lintner OSM on the Vatican's refusal to grant him the *nihil obstat*

- Wave of declarations of solidarity
- Reason for not appealing
- **“The Lintner Case”: not an individual case, but an institutional problem**

The decision by the Vatican authorities to refuse assent to my election as dean of the Philosophical-Theological Academy at Brixen has caused enormous reactions in South Tirol, in the entire German-language area, and by now also in Italy and far beyond the Italian borders. I receive every day innumerable messages and declarations of support from European countries, as well as from other regions in the world. Since it is impossible for me to answer everyone personally, I should like to make a statement in this way.

I should like to thank the journalists who have asked for interviews, but have also respected my wish not to comment on my case immediately after the news became known. I myself have still to grasp the totality of the situation, the background factors, and the significance of what is happening here. I shall offer an initial assessment from my perspective below.

I express my cordial thanks to the theological associations and theologians that have made public statements. You will find a selection of them at the end of this statement. The support and the esteem by so many colleagues give me strength in these turbulent days. Nor do I forget the declaration of solidarity by groups and individuals from civil society and the political sphere. To experience this esteem, closeness, and encouragement is an overwhelming experience that fills me with humility. It does me good on the human level, since the Vatican decision surprised me too, and disturbed me.

The encouragement from very various quarters confirms me in my endeavor to carry out a bridging function as a theologian between church and society and to engage in a theology that is relevant to life and sensitive to pain, a theology that is meaningful for people in their concrete existential situations and challenges.

The Vatican decision against me has led in many of the faithful not only to incomprehension, but also to a serious annoyance. It casts doubt on the success of synodality. I am also unhappy to see how other people's critical or even negative attitude towards the church is confirmed.

Those who know me know that I am conscious of belonging to the church, and they know of my constructive-critical loyalty to the ecclesial magisterium.

I now wish to speak of the Philosophical-Theological Academy in Brixen. I thank the body of my colleagues for the trust they showed in electing me as dean, and Bishop Dr. Ivo Muser, who assented to the election. The negative response from the Vatican poses a challenge not only to me, but also to Bishop Muser and to the Academy.

I am very grateful to the professors, to the student representatives, and to the participants of the Brixen Theological Courses and to the university course in Applied Ethics for their solidarity.

Dr. Alexander Notdurfer, the dean, has been subjected to a heavy emotional burden in these days. He must now exercise the leadership of the Academy even beyond his own term of office, although he had already been looking forward to passing on this responsibility to me and to devoting more of his time once again to teaching and research.

I am especially grateful to Bishop Muser for his concern about my condition as a human being and about my future as a moral theologian. We have a good dialogue with each other, and this press statement has been discussed with him. He has granted my explicit request not to appeal against the Vatican decision. I naturally want to avoid letting my Academy or my own person being dragged into a procedure that may take a long time and exact a heavy cost on everyone's nerves.

I believe that the reactions on the part of the theological associations, which are sometimes vehement and emotional, are an expression of the justified concern for the credibility of scientific theology in the context of universities as well as in the context of a secular society. They also show clearly that anger and a sense of powerlessness on the part of very many colleagues are finding expression here. These are women and men who have been confronted with comparable problems and hindrances in the course of their academic careers. These problems have been an open secret for decades. For those involved, they are a burden, combined with the feeling of humiliation and with emotional pain; in some instances, professional careers suffered lasting harm. And the personal identification with the church can also suffer through this situation. Many prefer to remain silent, out of fear that they may lose their reputation as a theologian and that they may be suspected of a lack of loyalty to the Church. When I was president of the European Association of Catholic Theology and the

International Network of Associations of Catholic Theology, I came to know many such life-stories.

This has shown me clearly that what is involved here is not only individual cases, but an institutional problem. In formal and informal conversations with leaders and officials of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of the Congregation for Education, I have been the spokesman for these colleagues, and I have spoken about these problems. My impression was that the Congregations – now Dicasteries – were aware of the problems and that they recognized the need to revise the procedure and to lead the proceedings transparently and fairly.

My desire and hope is that my case may help to build a constructive relationship of trust and dialogue between the magisterium and academic theology, between the Dicasteries and the theological associations, faculties, and academic institutions. I am convinced that this is in accordance with the spirit of synodality to which Pope Francis wishes to lead the church.

Martin M. Lintner

Brixen, July 3, 2023

Some statements from the field of theology

- [European Society for Catholic Theology](#)
- [Internationale Vereinigung für Moraltheologie und Sozialethik, AG Moraltheologie, AG Christliche Sozialethik, AG Moraltheologie Österreich mit Südtirol](#)
- [ATISM – Associazione Teologica Italiana per lo Studio della Morale](#)
- [Katholisch-Theologischer Fakultätentag](#)
- [Professorenkollegium der PTH Brixen](#)
- [Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät der Universität Innsbruck: Guggenberger Wilhelm, Hofmann Stefan, Ladner Gertraud](#)

- [Forum Hochschule und Kirche](#)
- [Katholisches Forum in Südtirol](#)
- [Marcello Neri](#)
- [Cristina Simonelli](#)
- [Andrea Grillo](#)
- [Umberto Del Giudice](#)
- [Lettera aperta sul caso del prof. Lintner](#)