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The Vatican's decision to veto the appointment of a respected moral theologian as the dean of a theological school in northern Italy has sparked international criticism among academics.

The theological academy in Brixen said in a June 26 statement that the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education had vetoed the appointment of Servite Fr. Martin Lintner, who has been a full professor at the academy since 2011.



Servite Fr. Martin Lintner, seen at a meeting of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2018. (NCR photo/Joshua J. McElwee)

The statement said Lintner, a former president of the European Society for Catholic Theology and of the International Association for Moral Theology and Social Ethics, did not receive Vatican approval because of unspecified writings on matters of sexual ethics.

Several international theological societies have issued statements protesting the decision. In a joint statement on June 28, three European theological groups strongly condemned the move and said it rendered dialogue between the Vatican and

academics "implausible."

Lintner undoubtedly had "merits as a mediator between scientific discourse, concrete life experiences and social debates, between theology and church teaching, tradition and necessary innovation," they said.

The theologians said the Vatican's action disregarded academic freedom and had damaged the reputation of Catholic theology.

The theological academy said in its statement that the Vatican's veto as dean would not affect Lintner's ability to continue teaching theology. The statement was released under the signature of Bishop Ivo Muser, who leads the Italian Diocese of Bozen-Brixen and serves as the chancellor of the academy.

It said Muser had decided not to appeal the decision, "in agreement" with Lintner.

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