

AUSTRIA

Sexual scandals in Benedictine monastery blocks Cardinal Schönborn's succession

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Laurentius Eschlböck OSB appointed new coordinator of CDCS program

Full story and description at www.anselmianum.com

Pictured : Rector Bernhard Eckerstorfer; Coordinator Thomas Quartier OSB, Radboud University Nijmegen;
and new Cultural Dimensions of Christian Spirituality Coordinator Laurentius Eschlböck

It should have been Dom Bernhard Eckerstorfer, to succeed Cardinal Christoph Schönborn in Vienna. Honoured by Pope Francis with a no less than five-year extension, the Czech-born cardinal, who recently turned eighty, was finally forced to leave the

episcopal see of the Austrian capital. In pole position to succeed him, both the Catholic daily *Die Tagespost* and Vienna's leading daily *Die Presse* had named the Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical Athenaeum Sant'Anselmo and monk at Kremsmünster Abbey (Austria) as his successor from 2020. Everything seemed ready for the transition, but something must have gone wrong.

Indeed, on 22 January the Vatican Press Office announced the acceptance of Schönborn's resignation and the appointment of an Apostolic Administrator in the person of the Episcopal Vicar of Unter dem Wienerwald, Father Josef Grünwidl. Barely three days later, the Benedictine community of Kremsmünster Abbey announced the election of its new abbot: Dom Bernhard Eckerstorfer himself, who thus lost both the "promised" position in Vienna and the post of Rector of Sant'Anselmo, in accordance with the statutes of the Athenaeum. But why?

Our sources suggest that to understand what happened it's necessary to go back to the year 2020, when Eckerstorfer, who had only been Rector for a few months, appointed his compatriot Father Laurentius Eschlböck as coordinator of the programme "*Cultural Dimensions of Christian Spirituality*" on behalf of Sant'Anselmo. The programme involves the collaboration of the Pontifical Athenaeum with the Benedictine Centre for Liturgical Studies of the Radboud University in Nijmegen (Netherlands) and the Mont-César (or Keizersberg) Abbey in Leuven. The coordinator of the Dutch branch was the Benedictine Thomas Quartier, professor at Radboud University and monk of St Willibrord's Abbey in Doetinchem, who was suddenly sent to Mont-César in 2020. And why was he transferred?

On 25 November last year, the independent newspaper of Radboud University, Vox, *reported on abuses* committed by Dom Quartier against a novice; abuses that the abbot of his home monastery himself acknowledged, which allegedly violated "moral, psychological, emotional and even sexual boundaries", although, as the abbot assured, these were not actual sexual acts (sic!). The facts date back to 2018, and already in 2020 the matter must have been known to the superiors, who arranged for the transfer of the problematic monk to Leuven; nevertheless, despite the serious accusation, Quartier was allowed to receive diaconal ordination, but not presbyteral ordination, which was finally blocked in 2023 by the bishop, Cardinal Jozef De Kesel, who did not want any problems since the news was coming out of the catacombs.

Exactly in 2020, as we have seen, Dom Eckerstorfer decided to consolidate the collaboration with Quartier and the Abbey of Mont-César. Meanwhile, at the end of November 2024, the abbey was closed by the leadership of the Sublacensis-Cassin

Congregation and the few remaining monks were sent to find a place in other monasteries. In fact, the judicial authorities of Leuven decided to open an investigation following a complaint by a man who had been discerning his vocation in the monastery of the university city and who had apparently been sexually abused by a monk.

It is likely that Eckerstorfer's involvement in the affair cost him his seat in Vienna and that the brothers intervened to repair the damage and make the fall out less obvious. In the meantime, Father Laurentius Eschlböck, whom Eckerstorfer had appointed to co-ordinate the project with Quartier, and whom he also wanted to be his vice-rector at Sant'Anselmo and future dean of theology, automatically took over as pro-rector.

So, once again, we have stories of consecrated men "crossing sexual boundaries" with other men. Yet - we are told and repeatedly told- homosexuality has nothing to do with sexual abuse.