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Mystical Theology in the Muslim-Christian Dialogue:
Chiara Lubich, André Scrima
and Classical Persian and Arab Authors
Hasso-Plattner Funded Research Project

Through a generous donation from the Hasso Plattner Institute in Germany, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu has been able in the past two years to run internal funding competitions especially for research related activities. In the summer of 2020, the university has organized a competition for experienced researchers – the Hasso-Plattner grants for excellence in research. For each research project proposal submitted, the evaluation of the application has been made by three external experts, with the logistical support of UEFISCDI. Within this competition, professor Stefan Tobler, director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, has won funding for a research project entitled: *Mystical Theology in the Islamic-Christian Dialogue: Chiara Lubich, André Scrima and Classical Authors from Persian and Arabic Culture*.

The research will be conducted for a period of twenty-four months by an inter-religious and interconfessional research team. Editor, translator, and exegete of Chiara Lubich's work, prof. Tobler aims through this research project to bring to light cases of mystics who, although radically living their faith, do not radicalize their religious discourse in the way we talk today about radicalization and religious fundamentalism; on the contrary, the authentic experience of a deeply lived faith enables these mystics to an expressed openness to the other. The focal point of the research will therefore be Chiara Lubich's mystical texts, especially *Paradiso* '49, where one can find elements for embracing inter-religious dialogue. Professor Adnane Mokrani (Senior Research Fellow and member of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies (Fscire), at Palermo, and Aggregated Professor of Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Relations at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome) will be part of the project team and will be exploring the possibilities that the encounter with Islam may bring about, especially by studying Islamic mystical traditions. Classical texts by Ibn 'Arabi, 'Attar and Rumi will provide the core of this study. Iulian Dancă will explore André Scrima's pioneering dialogue with Islam during his years in Lebanon. Scrima's theological discourse

was deeply embedded by apophatism and mysticism, and it might therefore provide the premises for a renewed understanding of unity, from a Christian Orthodox perspective. Two other positions – for a doctoral and a post-doctoral researcher – will be filled in the first months of the project.

The project summary may be referenced below:

Religions – and especially the competition between Islam and Christianity – play an important part in many current conflicts. Possible means for conflict resolution must be pursued on many levels, and one of them is the dialogue between religious traditions, but this dialogue can be successful only if it takes religious experiences seriously in their claim to truth. One form of religious expression, that is not of a fundamentalist type, but combines a strong connection to one's own tradition with genuine openness to dialogue, is mysticism. Islam has a long tradition of mystical writings (Rumi, 'Attar, Ibn-al-Arabi), which play a special role in Sufism. Christian writings of mystical thinkers (André Scrima) and with a mystical spirituality (Chiara Lubich) are possible bridges for the Christian-Islamic dialogue. This project will analyze for the first time the writings of the aforementioned authors in light of themes that are usually points of dissention in the Islamic-Christian dialogue – such as the image of God in the crucifixion, the trinity versus the strong monotheistic Islamic godhead. This analysis will be led by a team of interreligious scholars, making thus Islamic-Christian dialogue not only a research topic, but part of the research method of the project itself. This unprecedented research will enable the identification of mystical elements of the representation of God that facilitate inter-faith dialogue, rather than hinder it.

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