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Chinese State Church of the Brand Zwingli

Freedom of religion: The businessman (Moses) Wantian Cui wants to reconcile Christianity with the Chinese doctrine of the state. Zwingli [The Reformer from Zurich] serves him as a model.

Gospel, good news: Wantian Cui wanted his new software company registered under this name twenty years ago when founded. The Chinese government official told him: Only churches or hospitals are allowed to register under the name *Gospel*. The young entrepreneur wanted to know more about the monopoly of the Christian churches on good news, he joined the Protestant state church, was enthusiastic about the reformed theology and founded the Geneva Agape Foundation in Geneva, to propagate ethical entrepreneurship in his home country and globally.

FAITH CONFORM WITH GOVERNMENT

Cui’s Christian first name is Moses, the 44 years-old has meanwhile three software companies with a thousand employees set up and teaches at several Chinese universities in business, ethical entrepreneurship and religious issues. He closely followed the programmatic speech made by the State and Party leader Xi Jinping in mid-October. The speech did not disturb him. While western media fear with the new accumulation of power a totalitarian regime like at the time of Mao Zedong, for the professor of economics and Christian entrepreneur it awakens rather hope.

On the one hand, Cui compliments the president, that he is serious about the promise that blue sky will be again over Beijing. China will be the most successful country in combating climate change. As someone who warns churches and entrepreneurs insistently from nepotism and corruption, he also likes Xi's anti-corruption policy. And even in the concern that the president raised at a national conference that religious freedom in a Chinese perspective has its limits, he can win something: The religions must - like Socialism - bear itself a Chinese character, so the default of the party. Cui is convinced that it needs academic theological work to work to reconcile Confucianism and Taoism, rooted in China, with Christianity.

At the same time, Xi has emphasized the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. “Today, churches outside the state church can register as separate communities”, says Cui, but many of the independent house churches do not accept this way. He is often visiting free churches and encourage them to register. “To put the cards on the table – that is the future for us Christians in China.” The Zwingli model, where Church and State co-exist in partnership, fascinates him. “This could be a way for China.” Prerequisite is to seek the conversation with the government and to accept them as partners.

WITH STATE BLESSING

Some religious communities, like the Tibetan Buddhists or [one part of] the Roman Catholics are accused by the Chinese government to be controlled from abroad. In fact, the Chinese government wishes no influence from outside, neither from the Pope nor from the Dalai Lama, says the Swiss theologian and ethicist Christoph Stückelberger, who works closely with Cui as Director of his “Geneva Agape Foundation”. Also the conflict between USA and China plays a role: “American missionaries come in as English teachers, preach against the government in order to then denounce

China as a place of persecution of Christians.” He himself has as European, never had any difficulties when he lectured or preached in China. Cooperation with the state also pays off in terms of membership. While the underground Catholic Church are stagnating at around twelve million members, the number of Protestants is fast growing, according to Cui's estimate, the number is at least forty million, half of them, as himself, members of the state church.

THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM

Stückelberger wants to support Chinese Christians in Diakonia [social services]. With its “Amity Foundation”, the protestant state church is engaged in an exemplary way for example for integration of disabled people, earthquake victims or juvenile delinquents. Meanwhile, the government appreciates these skills, church staff conduct trainings for civil servants. “Social engagement is an important topic in the economically prosperous China”, says the ethicist.

Cui has opted to fight for change within the limits set by the system. Thus, the advocate of a green economy can act as a consultant for environmental issues in the Government or as mediator in conflicts between state authorities and churches. Nevertheless, Cui knows, that freedom has limits in his country. “Nobody in China can officially criticize the government.” The freedom of preaching and speech was a central value of the Reformation. In China it is not valid in spite of manifold economic opening.

The entrepreneur hopes to be able to influence the society with exemplary projects. “Every church, every company can be ethical business, can practice employees’ participation and can take responsibility for the environment and the society”. His credo: “Change, what you can change and make it better than the Government does.”

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Digital Translation from German to English, improved, controlled and approved by Christoph Stückelberger