

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

God Is Red

by

Liao Yiwu

1. Liao Yiwu, who is not a Christian, quotes a Christian man speaking about the opposition to Mao Zedong and Communism during the Cultural Revolution: “Sometimes, devils often follow the footsteps of God to undo his work” (p. xix). Have you experienced this, either personally or in a broader religious context?
2. Liao observes that some young people in China during the post-Mao period embraced Christianity because it was Western and thus “hip” (p. xx). Do you believe God can be at work even if one’s motivation for believing is superficial?
3. Despite many years of unfruitful labor among the Chinese in Dali, missionary Fanny Clarke, who died a few months after giving birth, asked to be buried in Dali as a way of claiming identity with the Dali people. This

gesture inspired an outpouring of interest in and conversion to Christianity (p. 6). In what way do you think Fanny's gesture affected this spiritual awakening in the local Chinese?

4. The same cemetery where Fanny Clarke was buried was targeted by the Communist regime in their effort to "wipe out the ancestral graves of the imperialists" (p. 8). Does it surprise you that a cemetery could provoke such hostility? Why or why not?
5. When the Communist regime announced that a particular church would have to undergo a "political review process," several church members renounced their association with the church and proclaimed, "I will listen to the words of Chairman Mao" (p. 18). Do you find it hard to believe that such a thing could happen in the twentieth century? What are your thoughts about the church members who renounced? Is it regrettable or understandable?
6. During the Communist repression, there were public denunciation meetings where believers were subjected to beatings and humiliation (p. 20). Most of us have never experienced such religious persecution. If you feel comfortable praying, take a moment to pray for those in China and elsewhere who are experiencing religious persecution.
7. Liao describes two elderly nuns who camped out in front of a government building to protest the seizure of church property (pp. 23–27). As a result of their persistent nonviolent protest, the government gave some of

the property back. In what way (if at all) does this example testify to the power of confronting evil with nonviolence?

8. Describing a worship service, Liao writes: “The service had a rhythm of rising and falling, like the wash of the tide against a beach: standing to sing the hymn, sitting to hear the sermon, kneeling to pray, standing again to sing another hymn” (p. 30). He added that his host, Kun Peng, said that “with the repetition of each act the heart became purer, more pious and more passionate.” Do you believe that worship involves a degree of physicality?
9. One of Liao’s interviewees described a meeting between Buddhists and Christians who lived in the same area: “When we get together for dinner with our friends or neighbors, they chant their Buddhist sutras and we say our prayers to seek God’s blessing. Then we toast each other with liquor. Occasionally we would take off our necklaces and compare whose pendants are prettier” (p. 31). Have you experienced a harmonious gathering of believers from different faith traditions? How might such a gathering change the religious climate of our times?
10. During Liao’s interview with respected Christian leader Wu Yongsheng, Wu remarked that when Christianity arrived through the work of Reverend Allen, “it spread fast because we have had many wonderful Christians like Rev. Allen, who, through their behavior, demonstrated the benevolence of God” (p. 44). Have you

known someone—a spiritual leader, mentor, or friend—who demonstrated God’s benevolence? How did this affect your spiritual journey? Does the benevolence of God show in your behavior?

11. Liao recounts the testimony of a Christian activist in Communist China in the late 1940s who would not renounce his faith and thus became a political target. He was brought before state officials, who asked, “Are you trying to challenge the power of the revolutionary masses?” He remained silent; his answer lay in his actions,” Liao writes (p. 52). How do you think your actions would speak if you were tested?
12. One of Liao’s interviewees said: “I don’t have to beg the Lord for anything. He knows everything. Each time I make some progress, he would reward me with blessing” (p. 78). Have you found this to be true of God in your experience?
13. On one occasion, Liao discovered that one of his most treasured (and hard-won) interviews had been inadvertently erased from the tape. He vigorously undertook the daunting steps to conduct a second interview. Reflecting on this incident, he writes, “Fortunately, erasing an interview from the tape could be made up with the help of devoted friends. . . . But what if we, as a nation, collectively lose our memory of our past?” (p. 99). Have you ever thought about this question, either on a personal or a national level? Is it important to retain collective memory? Why or why not?

14. One person recounted how, in his life, he had passed four tests: (1) losing a herd of goats under his care, all of which were miraculously restored; (2) catching smallpox and nearly dying; (3) enduring brutal beatings; and (4) nearly dying in a labor camp. In each instance, he reflected on the ways God intervened to help him (pp. 125–26). If you were to list the tests you have faced, how many would there be? Are you able to see God's care in the midst of them?
15. The same interviewee told Liao that the early 1940s were a “golden age” for Christianity in his province. It lasted until 1949, when the Communist regime banned religious activities (p. 131). Do you think God's presence and action are apparent in both a “golden age” and a period of religious restriction? How could this be?
16. In “The Feast,” Liao describes his deep longing and desperate search to locate the Southwestern Theology Seminary, which had been built by Australian missionaries who were buried there: “The seminary became an incubator for Christian leadership in the region. . . . Nearly all the Christian leaders I interviewed in the region mentioned this seminary and remarked on its tremendous influence over the local Christian community” (p. 144). He eventually found the seminary in ruins. Those nearby had no recollection of the renowned missionaries who established it. The chapter concludes with a discouraging sense of loss. How does this story make you feel? Are you tempted to conclude that the sacrifice and devotion of the missionaries were in vain? Why or why not?

17. Yuan Xiangchen quotes his father: “The biggest misfortune for a Christian does not lie in the calamity that befalls him in this world. It is the betrayal of God for the sake of secular things on earth” (p. 167). Do you agree with this statement? What might Christians embrace in this world that is tantamount to betraying God?
18. Liao describes a Catholic missionary called Sister Mann, who tore down a poster of Mao that had been posted in her school. Sister Mann insisted that “she didn’t rip down Mao’s poster for political reasons; she simply believed the secular government should not place its authority above that of God” (p. 212). Do you see similar gestures today? Are there any “posters” you would tear down?
19. In the final chapter, Liao describes a convert who told him, “We had been plunged into a bottomless pit of pop icon worshipping. I couldn’t get myself out, and my life had almost been ruined” (p. 220). What pop icons are worshipped in today’s cultural landscape? How does this affect people’s lives?