

Sun Yat-sen Centenary



The 12th of March is the centenary of the death of Sun Yat-sen, undoubtedly one of the great figures on the world stage during the 20th century. He is revered by the global Chinese community both in the People's Republic of China, where he is known as the Forerunner of the Revolution, and in Taiwan, where he is acknowledged as the Father of the Nation. Sun Yat-sen was at the forefront of confronting the despotic regime of the Qing Dynasty. Following the success of the 1911 Revolution, in 1912 he became the Provisional President of the Republic of China.

A primary influence on Sun Yat-sen was Dr James Cantlie. Cantlie taught medicine at the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese where Sun Yat-sen became a student. The two developed a lifelong friendship, a relationship that was to be critical in saving Sun Yat-sen from certain death when he was kidnapped by the Chinese Embassy whilst in exile in London in 1896. Incarcerated in the Embassy, Sun Yat-sen found himself facing the prospect of being smuggled out of the country to China to be executed. It fell to Cantlie to instigate a campaign that eventually secured Sun Yat-sen's release. It is fair to say that without Cantlie's help, the course of modern-day Chinese history would have taken a very different path.

Sun Yat-sen was a Christian and it was his Christian faith that sustained him in his darkest hour, locked up in a room in the Embassy, to all intents and purposes, 'disappeared'. He wrote in the account of his kidnapping, written with Cantlie's help, published in 1897, "My despair was complete, and only by prayer to God could I gain any comfort. Still the dreary days and still more dreary nights wore on, and but for the comfort afforded me by prayer I believe I should have gone mad. After my release I related to Mr. Cantlie how prayer was my one hope, and told him how I should never forget the feeling that

seemed to take possession of me as I rose from my knees on the morning of Friday 16th October – a feeling of calmness, hopefulness and confidence, that assured me my prayer was heard, and filled me with hope that all would yet be well.”

Sun Yat-sen often visited the Cantlie family home at Cottered. He was all too familiar with the house of prayer that is Cottered Church and doubtless worshipped within its walls. Cantlie’s grave and those of his sons keep vigil to the right of the church door. It is a site of pilgrimage for Chinese visitors from the world over. As we remember the centenary of Sun Yat-sen’s death, acknowledging his contribution to world history, we welcome such visitors into our midst.

May he rest in peace.

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey