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**Ferdinand Hamer 1840 - 1900, missie pionier en martelaar in China :  
een nieuwe kijk op de missiemethode van de Scheutisten in het  
noorden van China, en de reactie daarop van de Chinezen**

Knipschild, H.H.

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## Summary in English

Ferdinand Hubertus Hamer was born in Nijmegen on August 21, 1840 as the eighth child of a Roman catholic grocer. He was the son of Henricus Hamer and Alida Francisca van Aernsbergen. His brother Jacob (1827) was a Franciscan, his brother Jan became a Jesuit. Ferdinand, serious-minded but not very talented, wanted to join his elder brothers into priesthood. He followed their tracks and entered the preparatory seminary 'Kuilenburg' in Culemborg, which was run by the Society of Jesus. When the Jesuits refused Ferdinand as a future member of their society, the young man continued his studies in 1860 in the new seminary 'Rijnsburg', not far from Utrecht, where the archbishop had his seat. On August 10, 1864, the saint's day of the martyr Laurentius, Hamer was ordained a priest by Mgr. Andreas Schaepman of Utrecht.

A month before, he had made the Belgian father Théophile Verbist's acquaintance. The chaplain of the military academy of Brussels had founded in 1862 the Congregation of Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), in Scheut near Anderlecht. As national director of the Holy Childhood Verbist had become deeply concerned with the abandoned children in China and the lot of the 'ignorant' millions of Chinese. In order to recruit young priests for his congregation Verbist visited the Dutch seminaries. The zealous account he gave of his missionary plans in Rijnsburg persuaded Hamer to join the Belgian mission work.

The Propaganda Fide, the Vatican department for missionary affairs, decided to entrust Mongolia to the CICM. The first Scheut-caravan, consisting of Verbist, Van Segvelt, Vranckx, Hamer and a servant, Paul Splingaerd, left their home base on August 25, 1865. The fathers traveled first to Rome, where they were given an audience by Pope Pius IX. Afterwards their journey brought them to Cairo, Ceylon, Saigon, Hong Kong, and Shanghai in China, a country they were yet unacquainted with. An opium ship brought the fathers from Shanghai to the North-Chinese coast in the neighbourhood of Tianjin. On December 5, 1865, they arrived at their final destination, the christian village Xiwanzi in Mongolia, north of Beijing outside the Chinese Wall. They took the place of the French Lazarists at this missionary post.

Verbist, general superior of the congregation and provicar of Mongolia, sent out young Hamer (together with Petrus Lin, a Chinese priest) in January 1866 to reconnoitre the eastern part of their missionary area, with the aim to settle there as a missionary. Later Van Segvelt became the parish priest in the east of Mongolia, of which Jehol (now Chengde) was the most important city. The Scheut mission focused not so much on the nomadic Mongols, but on ethnic Chinese farmers fleeing China Proper and trying to seek refuge north of the Great Wall, where they hoped to settle and have a decent living. In the beginning Hamer had to spend most of his time learning the difficult Chinese language. Besides that, he had to adapt to the harsh Mongolian climate, a long extreme cold winter and a short hot summer, to primitive housing, strange food, different clothing and all kinds of Chinese customs.

The young Dutch father got rather easily familiar with his new surroundings. For his older co-congregationals, however, it was very hard to adapt. They tried to live as much as possible in a European style, which turned out to be very unhealthy. Van Segvelt died from a typhus fever in the spring of 1867, less than a year later Verbist went also down, probably a victim of the same illness. But the headquarters in Scheut were able to send out new priests every year. After a short interim ruling by Antoon Smorenburg (a Dutch ex-Lazarist), Hamer, not yet thirty years old, was proclaimed provicar ad interim in 1869 and thus became the superior of the Scheut fathers in China for several years. In

October 1871, Jaak Bax, former director in Scheut, arrived so that Ferdinand Hamer was able to concentrate again on his missionary work. In 1874, Rome appointed Bax as the first CICM-bishop. Hamer, already a veteran mission-worker, assisted him in many ways.

In 1878, Rome extended the Scheut mission with the Chinese provinces Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang. General superior Vranckx submitted to Rome Hamer as first bishop (apostolic vicar) of this immense territory. Pope Leo XIII appointed him on July 13, and on October 27, the name-day of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, he was consecrated by bishop Bax in Xiwanzi, with the title 'bishop of Tremite i.p.i.' (in partis infidelium). He set up his seat in Liangzhou (Gansu), northwest of the capital Lanzhou. The first Scheut fathers in Gansu arrived in the aftermath of a Muslim rebellion which had taken millions of lives. Zuo, the Chinese vice-roy, operating independently in Suzhou in the far west of China, was not pleased with a new source of unrest. He curtailed the activities of the Europeans as much as he could. Bishop Hamer, however, referred to the Chinese-French treaties of 1860. During the administration of Hamer Scheut was not very successful in converting the Chinese, but he was recognized as a good spiritual leader for the CICM-fathers. Besides that, he was careful in spending the money which had been raised by the European missionary organisations.

In 1883 the Vatican decided to split up Mongolia into three apostolic vicariats. The western part of it, along the Great Bend of the Yellow River, had to contend with big problems. Bishop De Vos was not able to unify his diocese; moreover the mission in the wild west of Mongolia showed a deficiency on the budget every year. When De Vos suddenly died in July 1888, Hamer was transferred to West Mongolia. It was his job to reorganize the vicariat. But the bishop first had to go back to Europe because of serious stomach complaints. In his hometown Nijmegen in 1890, and elsewhere, he got a tremendous welcome. In Belgium, however, he came into serious conflict with Jérôme Van Aertselaer, the new Scheut general superior. Hamer, back in Mongolia in June 1891, had lost the support of his own congregation. Within a year he became a lonely figure, especially after his old friend bishop Bax died in January 1895. The Scheut fathers more and more came to look upon him as an old man, with old-fashioned ideas.

Without telling Hamer, when he was in Belgium, superior Van Aertselaer had appointed the Flemish father Alfons Bermijn as provincial of the Scheut mission in West Mongolia. Because of new constitutions a separation of powers was introduced within the mission field. Bermijn, thirteen years younger than Hamer, was a priest of a new generation with ideas that were based on western imperialism. Supported by his superiors in Belgium, the provincial introduced his own policies. Bishop Hamer now considered himself an outcast and offered his resignation in Rome. He had to wait three years for a reply and then the answer was 'no'. Moreover, superior Van Aertselaer was inaccessible. Without informing Hamer he had left for the African Congo, a new missionary field of Scheut. In Ordos was a famine for several years, several missionaries died from typhus fever and other diseases, a new Muslim rebellion in Gansu threatened the missionposts of Scheut everywhere. In these years, the 1890s, bishop Hamer was not able to solve the problems he had to cope with. In the mean time, the financial problems became bigger and bigger.

The group-Bermijn, the so-called Iron Brigade, treated the Chinese and Mongolian authorities more and more in an aggressive way. More than Hamer, provincial Bermijn wanted to be insistent on farming out huge pieces of land to the mission for agriculture by Chinese converts. The old bishop, weary of life, decided to give in to all the demands of Bermijn. In the last years of the century the European powers forced China to make all kinds of concessions, hand over harbours, pay indemnities and bestow favours. At the same time, the north of China, including West Mongolia, was struck by a period of

drought, with famine as a result. Chinese farmers saw the European advance as the cause of their problems. The Boxer Rebellion spreaded from the Shandong peninsula to the area where Hamer and Bermijn were missionaries. On May 18, 1900 missionaries and Christian converts of the Iron Brigade forced Chinese farmers off their land and killed several of them in the neighbourhood of the new missionary residence Ershisiqingdi. Anti-Christian Boxer pamphlets appeared everywhere.

Hamer understood how serious the situation was. He ordered his missionaries to leave the area, but refused to leave the Christian converts in this critical hour. On July 19, 1900 Ershisiqingdi was conquered and destroyed. Hamer was taken away, tried, had to undergo the *lingchi* and was executed. The Chinese wrapped him up with wadding, poured oil on it and put it all to fire. Bischof Hamer was burnt alive. He had become a martyr.

The news of the terrible death of bishop Hamer arrived in the Netherlands two months later. The Congregation of Scheut took the initiative for the fund raising of a statue of the new martyr in his hometown Nijmegen. The monument, designed by Bart van Hove in Amsterdam and financed by all kinds of gifts, including those of Dutch Queen Wilhelmina, her husband Hendrik and her mother Emma, was unveiled on September 28, 1902. Bishop Hamer became a symbol as the very missionary martyr, Nijmegen as a Roman Catholic city. All kinds of Roman Catholic organisations decided to settle in Nijmegen, including the Jesuits and the fathers of Scheut. A Roman Catholic university (now called Radboud University) was also established in Nijmegen.

Scheut also wanted to have Hamer canonized. The fathers in Mongolia collected the proof of his martyrdom and sent the material to Rome. But Scheut was unexperienced in this process, in which they made many mistakes. For many years they worked with the wrong lawyer, who did not spend enough time on the Hamer case (but did not forget to send the bills). In any case, one had to wait for a pope who was willing to proceed. In the mean time, China was involved in many revolutionary periods. The missionaries of Scheut were driven out of their territories by Mao Zedong. In Europe there were hardly any new young priests with a missionary zeal. The Cultural Revolution in China and the secularization in the northwestern part of Europe made an end to all the efforts of Scheut. The fathers, afraid of reprisals of the Chinese authorities, decided to put the process to an end in the 1970s. The martyr was never canonized, not even beatified.

