Summary

How did the ideas about the intimate men/women-relationship developed among church members and non-church members in the Netherlands since the mid-sixties? This question has been answered in this article on the ground of data of several surveys of the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau. The investigation was placed in the theoretical framework of the privatization thesis in the sociology of religion. It is shown that during the last decades the discrepancy in the opinion among both groups has decreased strongly concerning birth control propaganda and consciously childless marriages, has decreased slightly concerning division of roles between men and women, and has increased concerning marriage, divorce, division of roles between men and women and sexuality. The attitude against the last mentioned matters seems to be in increasing extent a characteristic element of the identity of church members in the Netherlands.

1. Introduction

In the last decades religion in Western Europe has been characterized by several radical developments. The interest for the churches has decreased drastically and many Christian organisations have fallen into decay. There is talk of 'secularization' and 'de-pillarization'. In Christianity the plurality has increased. Within the established churches several new movements arose, like the oecumenical movement, the evangelical movement and recently the holistical movement. Furthermore, at broad levels of the churches increasing attention is paid to experience as a source of religious life. This development can be typified as 'subjectivation'.

Of old, marriage and family have been central elements in Christianity. The traditional Catholic doctrine considers marriage as an institution of God, which may never be broken. Marriage does not only belong to the natural, but also to the super-natural order; it is a sacrament. Propagation is looked upon as the most important goal of marriage. In orthodox Protestantism
marriage also has a high status. Though from the protestant point of view marriage is not a sacrament, traditionally it is still considered as a 'holy ordination of God'. Family-building is an order and a gift of God.

Research shows that in the churches the vision on the men/women-relationship has also changed in the last decades. The changes are not very clear in the official doctrines of the churches, at least so far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, but they are in the opinions of the members of the churches. The European Values Studies (EVS) show, for example, an increasing moral permissivism in many European countries in the eighties under churched people and populations as a whole (cf. Halman, De Moor 1993). The project 'Sociaal-culturele ontwikkelingen in Nederland' (SOCON) points out this tendency also under different groups of the population of the Netherlands during the eighties (cf. Felling, Peters & Schreuder 1986; Avort 1988; Verweij & Halman 1994).

This article deals specifically with the developments of ideas about the intimate men/women-relationship under church members and under non-church members since the early sixties. Were they different in both groups or similar? Does the discrepancies between the opinions of church members and non-church members increase, remain constant or decrease? For practical reasons, I will restrict my research to the Dutch situation.

The investigation to the questions will be placed in the framework of the privatization thesis in the sociology of religion, which concerns the development of the link between religion and matters of public life and private life. This thesis suggests among other things that even in modern societies religious and non-religious people has different opinions about matters of personal life.

For answering the mentioned questions, I shall use data of several large-scale surveys of the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (SCP). This governmental institute is the only institute in the Netherlands which has carried out regular national surveys since the early sixties, in which we find questions about church involvement and about opinions about different aspects of the intimate relation between men and women.

This article has the following structure. First, the privatization thesis will be described and discussed. Then, I will formulate my hypothesis concerning the subject at issue and pay attention to the operationalization of the central issues of religion and the relationship between men and women. In the fourth section the data of the SCP will be presented. In the last section, I will summarize the results and make some concluding remarks.