

Government and Family: influence or intrusion?

*A comparative study on family policies
in an international perspective*

Jaco van den Brink

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Introduction

On the occasion of the fifth *World Congress of Families*, the Guido de Brès-Foundation, the Research Department of the Christian Reformed Party (SGP), would like to present this essay on the place occupied by the family in government policy.

Another reason prompting this paper, besides this *World Congress* in Amsterdam, was the debate taking place on the degree of government intervention in the family sphere. At present this subject is a focus for much debate in the Netherlands. Reflection on the question as to **whether the 'strong arm' of the government should extend into the family sphere** and, if so, how far and with what objective, also seems to be a relevant topic of discussion in other countries. Therefore this paper addresses the question of how far the government may intervene in the functioning of the family - behind the front door, as it were. It also seeks to respond to developments in modern society which are seen to be undermining the position of the family. For a more detailed overview of the contents, we refer the reader to sections 1.3 and 1.4 of the first chapter, where the questions are explained and a reading guide is outlined.

Approach

Tacit assumptions and underlying principles very often play a role when reflecting on the family. First the perception of man: is man an individual, a socially evolved animal, a community being or a responsible person, placed in a relationship with God and his fellow human beings? Then the perception of society: is society a collection of separate individuals or an entirety made up of communities? And whose interest is predominant: that of the collective or that of the individual? Third the perception of government and authority is also important. Is man the source of authority and is the government a human institution based on a social contract? Or does authority ultimately rest on ordinance from God and are people, including governments, accountable to the Creator of Heaven and Earth? Answers to these questions are decisive in determining our perceptions of the relationship between the government, family, market and society.

Anyone who studies government policy in various western countries and the effect this has on families quickly develops a suspicion that there

must be some friction - if not conflict - between the policy implemented and Article 16c of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which these same governments have endorsed. This Article reads: **'The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State'**. Without going too deeply into the causes of this discrepancy, a general conclusion can be drawn – namely that western governments focus primarily on the individual and free market in their policies, and attach little or minor importance to the interests of families. This paper argues that there is and must be an alternative – for stable and close-knit families represent the foundation of society, both now and in the future. A society in which the State or the market dominate over life and society is a society which is out of balance and a society which deprives its citizens of fundamental values.

Responsibility

This paper will be distributed at the fifth *World Congress of Families* among delegates who are interested in the relationship between government and family, in family policy itself and in the question of sound principles and effective policy-making. The research conducted for the purposes of this study was modest in scope and structure. It included a study of literature on this subject and a comparison of family policy and welfare policies for young people in just four western countries, namely the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States of America. We want to illustrate to our readers how the biblical principles of the Christian Reformed Party can be used as a basis for meaningful discussion of current government policies for the family. A greater part of the study focuses on assessing current Dutch government policy, but readers may adapt this to the situation in their own and in other countries.

Request

If, after reading this paper, you have any questions or would like to make a comment, please do not hesitate to pass these on to us by using the address given below. A comment in Dutch, English, French or German is preferable but you may also submit your ideas in your own language. We would appreciate any remarks, criticism or comments to help us in future discussions or for more research to be made into this subject, and would like to express our sincere thanks for your contribution.

Word of thanks

On behalf of the Guido de Brès-Foundation, I would first like to thank Jaco van den Brink who carried out the research into types of family policy and wrote this essay as part of his internship with our Research Department. A word of thanks is also due to Gijsbert Leertouwer, policy assistant on family policy for the SGP party in the Second Chamber, who gave his critical comments on the draft version. Finally I would like to thank Maris van der Laak, who translated the original Dutch text into English, the lingua franca of our time.

I hope that this comment will be warmly welcomed and that its conclusions and recommendations will lead to a fruitful exchange of thoughts and ideas. The many families in our society are more than worth it!

*Jan A. Schippers,
Director, Guido de Brès-Foundation*

Contact

E-mail: wi@sgp.nl
Phone: +31 (0)182 696 911
Fax: +31 (0)182 573 222
Mail: Guido de Brès-Foundation (Research Department for the SGP), Burg. Van Reenensingel 101, 2803 PA GOUDA, The Netherlands
Internet: www.wi.sgp.nl

This publication is offered free of charge to the delegates of the *World Families Congress V*. If you would like to make a donation towards its cost, please do so via bank account no. 93021 in the name of Guido de Brès-Stichting (WI-SGP) in Gouda, the Netherlands. If you are making the payment from abroad, please quote the International Bank Account Number: NL12 INGB 0000 0930 21; the Bank Identifier Code (Swift) is: INGBNL2A. Thank you very much for your contribution.

1. Exploration of study

At the beginning of the last century, when states in the western world began gradually developing their social security systems, governments started to give greater prominence to the role of the family in their policy-making. Young offenders, for example, needed to be re-educated, and governments often had clearly defined perceptions of the way children should be brought up and of how tasks in the family should be divided. In this context, family policies emerged in most western countries. Variations in the extent and the way in which governments interfered in family life were a reflection of the differences in the various political cultures.

Much research has been carried out on the role that government policy has played in developments in the family. This study will focus on the question whether government intervention may ever be unlimited in matters affecting family life. Its primary focus will be on the Netherlands, since various dramatic incidents in the family domain have caused a great deal of commotion concerning care for the safety of children. The increasing number of broken homes and unstable situations which children are brought up in has raised questions as to whether the government has a responsibility for these families and for the children, in particular. In an attempt to present a substantiated answer to these and other questions, this study will contain an international comparison, so that Dutch policies on family and young people can be assessed in relation to those of three other countries. This chapter will first outline a number of developments that have influenced the family, followed by a presentation of the questions examined in this study, and a short overview of the contents.

1.1 Social developments

A wide range of factors has brought about many changes to the family, not just in the Netherlands but throughout the entire western world. First, there will be a brief examination of a number of background developments which underpin these changes, followed by a discussion of the changes themselves, and then a more detailed study of the particular situation in the Netherlands and the related underlying causes will be made.

One influential change which occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution was that the family lost its role as a unit of production and that parents became less dependent on each other and on their children. Many of the care and social functions which had once been fulfilled in the family domain were taken over by other organisations or institutions, very often the State. In western society, living together in an extended family unit (three or more generations) made way for the nuclear family unit (two generations). The fall in mortality and birth rates which occurred during the last century also had a substantial effect on the family and family relationships. The drop in mortality rates was a consequence of technological innovations and developments made in the medical field. The fall in birth rates was due mainly to new methods of birth control.¹

Another important factor influencing the many changes affecting the family unit is the increasing individualisation of society, which has gathered significant impetus since the 1960s. Extended networks like the family began to decline in importance and individuals increasingly wanted to make their own decisions. The processes of secularisation and democratisation were closely linked to the concept of individual autonomy; one of the important and successful movements in this **context was that of women's liberation. Thinking in terms of self-determination and self-fulfilment** is illustrated quite strikingly by the fact that the pregnancy termination legalisation is receiving increasing approval.

The processes outlined above all lead, in the words of the sociologist **David Cheal, to "a shift from involuntary to voluntary forces controlling family life".**² As the members of the family became less and less dependent on each other and many other things in life became controllable, the coherence within the family unit became increasingly dependent on the will of its members, and since these members

¹ Robert Cliquet, *Major trends affecting families in the new millennium: Western Europe and North America*, United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development 2003-04, 15-18. See also: Wim H. Dekker, 'Het gezin in de laat-moderne samenleving' [The family in post-modern society] in: Wim. H. Dekker and Roel Kuiper (ed.), *Alle vogels hebben nesten. Nieuwe aandacht voor gezin en gezinshulpverlening* [All birds have a nest. Renewed interest in the family and family help services], Amsterdam sa., 9-20.

² David Cheal, *Families in today's world. A comparative approach*, New York/London 2008, 15.

preferred to act autonomously, the voluntary basis was sometimes undermined.

This is not the appropriate forum for reviewing in greater detail all the developments in the family which have occurred over the last few decades: listing certain aspects, such as the fact that households have become smaller, as a consequence of lower birth-rates, should be sufficient. Fertility statistics have fallen markedly and are now too low to maintain the population size at its current level. (Incidentally, this bears little relation to the desired number of children, which is usually higher than the actual number, but has more to do with the trend of **'putting off having children'**.) **It all points to a rise in the size of the ageing population.** People marry later, and have their children at a later age. The number of marriages is decreasing and marriage is no longer a matter of course: alternatives include unmarried co-habitation and LAT relationships.³ The number of divorces has also risen, and concomitantly the number of single-parent families. As already mentioned, the extended family with all its social networks has declined in importance.⁴ A universally recurring problem is the question of how to combine work and care for the children, now that many families contain two working parents.⁵

1.2 The Netherlands

After several decades during which the Dutch political scene bestowed little attention on the family, the past fifteen years have seen it moving more and more into the spotlight. In 1994, Enneüs Heerma, the chairman of the Christian Democratic Appeal parliamentary party in the Dutch Lower Chamber, was ridiculed because he dared to suggest that a family minister should be appointed, but by 2007 the Netherlands had a Minister for Youth and Family.

Although the significance of the family and traditional, marital and family values was rarely the subject of discussion until the 1960s and 1970s, the processes of secularisation and individualisation accompanied by an emphasis on emancipation and self-development produced a dramatic change. Marriage and the family became increasingly **associated with 'traditionalism' and 'moralism'**. **In the same way that the**

³ Lat stands for Living-apart-together.

⁴ Cliquet, *Major trends affecting families*, 1-15.

⁵ Cheal, *Families in today's world*, 66-77.

government generally felt constrained from basing its policies on any other moral principles than those of the autonomy of the individual, it was time to say farewell to the moral restrictions of the Christian era with regard to marriage and the family.⁶

The second half of the 1990s marked the slow but sure growth of political interest in the family; this was all the more remarkable because the government had, in general, been steering a non-interventionist course over these years. The welfare state had shown that it could not achieve its ambitions. Until recently, the Dutch government followed an **'implicit' family policy, one in which a number of facilities and fiscal measures were made available for families.** The present Cabinet is pursuing an **'explicit' family policy.** The family has moved once again to the forefront of the social and political agenda, although it should be noted here that, in the last decades, the definition of the family has been extended in Dutch policy. As a result, marriage between two people of different sexes is no longer the automatic foundation of the family. Although the Cabinet clearly has a positive appreciation of the value attached to the family, it does not necessarily mean that no critical remarks may be expressed concerning current family policy.

In the following section, we will examine a number of trends which concern the position of the family in Dutch society in greater detail. Individualisation left a clear mark on society and families in the Netherlands in the 1960s, although its roots, of course, lay much further in the past. It should be noted that the consequences of individualisation not only affect family structures - the falling interest in marriage and the rise in other forms of living together - but also **affect people's experience of marriage and family life. People's attitudes have changed.**⁷ It seems as if relationships are much more fragile and not as strong, so that families break up more quickly, even though the children might suffer.

⁶ Frans van der Veer, 'De terugkeer van het gezin in het overheidsbeleid' [The return of the family in government policy] in: Dekker and Kuiper (ed.), *Alle vogels hebben nesten*, 51-64.

⁷ Roel Kuiper, 'Het gezin in de branding van de maatschappij' [The family in the throes of society] in: D.J. Steensma, M. Verhage-Van Kooten and J. Westert et al., *Individualisering en gezinsbeleid. Gezin, arbeid, opvoeding en zorg in het licht van christelijke politiek* [Individualisation and family policy. Family, work, parenting and care in the light of Christian politics], Nunspeet 1998, 8-22, 13-18.

Roel Kuiper, lector Community Issues of the Reformed University of applied sciences in Zwolle, has pointed to the development of the socialisation of the family alongside this individualisation, reasoning that the family is increasingly subject to social institutions such as the government and the market. The market exerts a considerable influence, for example in the shape of double-income households. There is a very real danger that family life will be dominated by work, production and consumption, and that the family's own social and moral domain will be under pressure.⁸

Conservative thinkers have rightly expressed fierce criticism of these paradigms. In his book, *Geografie van goed en kwaad* [Geography of good and evil], Andreas Kinning, professor of legal philosophy at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, pointed out the particular importance that marriage and the family have for society and demonstrated that their undervaluation in recent decades has been particularly inappropriate. He also argued that instinct plays too great a role in the modern concept of love, due in part to the Romantic Movement, and that this leaves too little scope for virtue, willpower and fidelity.⁹ The culture critic, Ad Verbrugge, department of philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam, blames the consumer society. He thinks that modern man is too easily led by the desire for immediate gratification. People have forgotten that man is a community being and that social ties like family and marriage have their own intrinsic value.¹⁰

There is a discernible trend in the Netherlands, as in all Western countries, for couples to 'decide' to have children relatively late in life. In 2006 the average age in which women had their first child was 29.4 years,¹¹ which is quite old when compared to many other Western

⁸ Kuiper, 'Het gezin in de branding van de maatschappij', 18-21.

⁹ Andreas Kinning, *Geografie van goed en kwaad. Filosofische essays* [Geography of good and evil. Philosophical essays], fifth edition, Utrecht 2005, 181-225.

¹⁰ Ad Verbrugge, *Tijd van onbehagen. Filosofische essays over een cultuur op drift* [Time of unease. Philosophical essays on a culture adrift], third edition, Amsterdam 2004, 194-285.

¹¹ Raad voor de Volksgezondheid & Zorg, *Uitstel van ouderschap: medisch of maatschappelijk probleem* [Postponing parenthood; medical or social problem], The Hague 2007, 9. This is an average figure of all mothers. The average age of having the first child for higher educated mothers is 33, *ibid.* 94. This study explores, in particular, the medical risks associated with postponing parenthood and the possible role that the government can take in preventing them.

European countries. Families are relatively small in the Netherlands: women born after 1975 have an average of 1.7 children.¹² There are also many divorces and alternative forms of co-habitation. The number of single-parent families has increased significantly in recent years. In 2006, one in five or six families was a single-parent family, and in 84% of these families the parent was a woman. Half were a result of divorce, and there has been an increase in the number of children involved in divorce. The number of children in single-parent families is lower than average: usually just one child.¹³ E-Quality Knowledge Centre has also discerned an increase in the number of children who were born *and* growing up in an unmarried, cohabitation relationship.¹⁴ In addition, family poverty, social exclusion and other related problems deserve greater consideration in the Netherlands. In 2005 10% of all Dutch households were living below the low-income limit. The percentage for single-parent families in which all the children were under 18 was 41% while the percentages were less than 10% for couples without children or with grown-up children.¹⁵

The Netherlands are also well-known for having many mothers who have solved the problem of combining work and care by working part-time. Of **the families with minor children, 48% had 'one-and-a-half wage-earners'**,¹⁶ 31% worked according to the breadwinner model, and in 6.5% cases, both parents worked full-time (for the total number of couples this last percentage was 13.5%). In 2005 61% of mothers worked 12 hours or more a week.¹⁷ Incidentally the government is implementing an active policy which is intended to increase the participation of mothers in the workforce and to promote childcare.

Youth

As we have just seen, there is considerable political and social interest in the family but there is also increasing attention being paid to the problems concerning young people. One sticking point in this context is that these problems often occur in families behind closed doors.

¹² E-Quality, *Gezinnen van de toekomst. Cijfers en trends* [Families of the future. Statistics and trends], The Hague 2008, 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-104.

¹⁶ This means that one of the partners (usually the father) works full-time and the other partner (usually the mother) works 12-34 hours a week.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-96.

Although the majority of families manage very well, there are some with problems, often in connection with bringing up children. The Cabinet has considered this subject and is working on a policy to tackle such problems energetically and preferably preventively. Youth welfare policy is under review and ways of creating more effective structures are being examined, but it is debatable how far government intervention may extend before it becomes an unacceptable intrusion in the family circle. The Dutch Council for Public Health and Health Care (RVZ) concluded that the demand for greater government intervention has increased in recent years. According to the RVZ, there are three important reasons for this. First, it mentions the rising figures concerning problems involving young people (such as early school-leaving, alcohol consumption and child abuse).¹⁸ Second, socio-cultural developments are also a contributory factor, in the context of the changing views about parenting and the role of the government. Whereas the emphasis in parenting during the years between 1960 and 1990 was on being articulate and autonomous, greater prominence has been given to the **notion of 'participation' in last two decades: children must grow up to be participating citizens and their childhood must be a time when they can really be children.** A more important role is allotted to society as a whole (which therefore includes the government) as part of this process, and in this role the government must guarantee that children can develop and participate in society. Third, scientific findings, which have revealed the advantages of early identification and intervention in problems, have been a reason for some circles to plead for greater intervention.¹⁹

In 2008 the Dutch National Youth Monitor revealed that roughly 60% of parents who were worried about their children and other parenting issues turned to those outside their circle of family and acquaintances for help or advice. While most parents consulted the family doctor, the

¹⁸ NB: The RVZ correctly remarks here that a difference in perception and definition **may underlie the increased figures. The terms 'child abuse' or 'neglect' are now given** a much wider interpretation than in the past.

¹⁹ Raad voor de Volksgezondheid & Zorg. *Dilemma's op de drempel. Signaleren en ingrijpen van professionals in opvoedingssituaties* [Dilemmas on the threshold. Indication and intervention by professionals in parenting situations], Signalering ethiek en gezondheid 2008/2, Den Haag: Centrum voor ethiek en gezondheid [Centre for Ethics and Health], 2008, 15-22. See also: Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, *Gezin anno nu* [The family now], The Hague 2005, 50-57.

teacher or the child health centre, single parents were more likely to approach social work organisations and youth care and youth health care agencies.²⁰ A survey conducted by E-Quality, the Dutch knowledge centre for gender, family and diversity issues, showed that by far the majority of parents do not want a government policy which offers a wide range of parenting support. They preferred easily accessible information services where specific questions could be asked and opportunities to discuss their experiences with other parents.²¹

The Youth Monitor also pointed out that there was an increase in the number of reports of child abuse to the Child Abuse Reporting Agency (Advies-en Meldpunt Kindermishandeling (AMK)). In 2002 this figure was 25,000 and in 2007 50,000.²³ Savannah is still fresh in the Dutch collective memory; a girl who was mistreated and killed by her parents

Tabel 1.1 Increase of interventions by Dutch youth care²²

Year	Number of children under supervision as of 31-12	Number of children under guardianship as of 31-12
1998	19 445	4 743
2002	20 429	5 001
2006	26 379	5 212
2007	29 503	5 337

while under Dutch Youth Care Office supervision. In response to this, the youth care agencies are now much more likely to intervene if a

²⁰ Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *Jaarrapport 2008 Landelijke Jeugdmonitor* [Annual report 2008 National Youth Monitor], The Hague/Heerlen 2008, 26-27.

²¹ E-Quality, *Gezinnen van de toekomst. Opvoeding en opvoedingsondersteuning* [Families of the future. Parenting and parenting support], The Hague 2008, 123-124.

²² Data derived from CBS [Dutch Central Statistical Office], <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=70809NED&D1=a&D2=a&HDR=T&STB=G1&CHARTT YPE=1&VW=T>, date of latest amendment 11 May 2009, last visited on 23 May 2009.

For an explanation of the terms 'placing under supervision' and 'guardianship', see Section 2.2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 37-38. . It should be noted here that these increased figures may not represent the full picture. There is a clear impression that the 'Savannah' effect on social workers in the Netherlands contributed to this increase, similar to the Baby P effect in England, insofar they display risk-avoidance reactions and are inclined to intervene at an earlier stage.

family starts to become dysfunctional.²⁴ In 2006 another girl was killed by her father; she was nicknamed the Maas girl after the River Maas near Rotterdam where she was found. Over the last ten years, appeals to youth care have been made with increasing speed (see table 1.1).

In its preliminary report in 2008, the Dutch Council for Social Development (RMO) emphasised the importance of the *village*, a social environment in which children can grow up in safety and where parents can obtain help with child rearing within a framework of neighbourhood and other social ties. The RMO concluded that networks such as these had started to disappear, as a result of developments such as increased migration, longer home-work travel distances, modern media and professionalization of other institutions. As will be explained in the following chapter, the Cabinet is making every effort to strengthen the *village* once more.²⁵

1.3 Questions

In 2006 the Research Department of the Christian Reformed Party, the SGP, published its study entitled *Goedgezinde politiek* [Family-friendly politics],²⁶ which examined recent demographic developments concerning the family and documented socio-fiscal aspects of Dutch family policy compared to policy in other European countries. The aim of this new essay is to explore a specific aspect of the SGP perception on family policy, in relation to questions concerning the legitimacy of government intervention in the private domain, partly by using international comparison as an aid.

²⁴ *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 'Medewerkers Jeugdzorg grijpen sneller in' [Workers from Youth care intervene earlier], 7 January 2009.

²⁵ Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, *Versterken van de village. Preadvies over gezinnen en hun sociale omgeving* [Strengthening the village. Preliminary advice on families and their social environment], Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling/Raad voor de Volksgezondheid & Zorg, The Hague, 2008.

²⁶ H.J. Hooglander et al, *Goedgezinde politiek. Nederlands gezinsbeleid in Europees perspectief* [Family-friendly politics. Dutch family policy in a European perspective], Gouda 2006. Other recent SGP publications on the family: Lezingenbundel 2000 *Wie de jeugd heeft heeft de toekomst* [Young people, our future]; Memorandum from the SGP group in the Dutch Lower Chamber 2003 *Een goed gezin...het halve werk* [A good family...is a good beginning]; *Themanummer jeugd en gezin van Zicht* [Theme issue on young people and the family in *Sight*], 2007 (33) no. 3.

As has already been mentioned, a great deal of effort is being **concentrated on tackling family problems 'behind the front door'**, which raises the question about the extent to which the government can and should be allowed to become involved. Consequently, this study will **centre on the extent of the government's role in carrying out a family policy** and the boundaries it encounters when intervening in the intimate sphere of families. A number of starting points will be formulated, partly on the basis of international comparisons, and an attempt will be made to use these points to provide guidelines for policy regarding intervention in the family.

1.4 Reading guide

The following chapter gives a brief outline of the present situation in the Netherlands; Chapter Three will present the framework of a theoretical model which can be used as a blueprint to characterise the various points of departure for the development of a family policy, followed by descriptions of an example of each of the three models as a basis for examining family policies in Sweden, the United States and Germany. Chapter Four will explore the **Christian Reformed Party's stance regarding the government's role and its extent, paying particular attention to its relationship to the relatively protected circle of the family**. In conclusion, these starting points will be used as an aid in formulating the family policy which is desired by the SGP, followed by an assessment of Dutch policy and of each of the three models in this context.

2. Youth and family policy in the Netherlands

As we learned in the previous chapter, there has been renewed government interest in the family in recent years; this chapter will show how present government policy is leading to the exertion of greater government influence within the family. Numerous measures have been introduced to enable the family to fulfil its function in the eyes of the government: offering a caring basis for children to be able to achieve their full potential. The following sections will summarise the most important of these measures; first the measures relating to the family in general and then those which are focused more specifically on the care of young people. The last chapter of the paper will return to this subject and examine the question as to whether extra government involvement in the family is justified.

2.1 Family policy in general

The Dutch government gives priority to freedom of choice as the official starting point for its family policy. This implies that the policy, and related concrete measures, should affect the freedom of choice of families or parents as little as possible. Parents are then completely free to choose between having one parent involved full-time in the care of the children, both parents working part-time or using childcare facilities. Although the combinations of care and work are available in theory, families which have only one bread-winner experience serious disadvantages as a consequence of their choice; the following section will explain.

Financial support for families

The Netherlands offers various kinds of financial support for families, primarily in the shape of child allowances and tax concessions; some are **part of the government's attempts to fight family poverty and to tackle** the effects of the consequent social exclusion. This is particularly true of the child-linked budget.²⁷ It should be noted here that, among EU

²⁷ Ibid. 53-55. As many as 9% of children in the Netherlands live in a family whose income is below poverty level. The child-linked budget is a means-tested provision providing a supplement for each child of parents with a lower income.

member states, the Netherlands ranks fairly low in child-centred financial support for families.²⁸ This is a consequence of the fact that the Dutch government primarily provides employment-centred family support. The government pays two-thirds of the cost of childcare as part of its support for families, and there is an extensive package of arrangements available for paid and unpaid parental leave, the most important **being sixteen weeks' paid maternity leave. An important aim** behind this policy is to keep employment participation by mothers at a high level.²⁹ The Cabinet seems to have a large blind spot here, because in all other possible ways it stresses its support for family life. Parents would have more options if the money currently spent on childcare was used for the benefit of all families with children.³⁰

The Cabinet's preference for families with two working parents is also expressed in its taxation regime. Tax paid on earnings is levied individually and, as a consequence, families with one bread-winner are taxed proportionally more heavily than those with a double income. Professor Leo Stevens of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, a fiscal economist, has already pointed out the inequality of taxation on families,³¹ but the Cabinet is still introducing tax measures which will only serve to increase this inequality. Professor Jos Teunissen of the Open University of Heerlen recently calculated that the new tax regime would impose an 84% heavier tax burden on breadwinner families than on those on double incomes. A household with one parent at home caring for the children would thus contribute just as much to the treasury as a double-income household whose income is almost half as much again.³²

²⁸ Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 38-51. Child-centred support refers to measures intended to provide financial support to families for the care of their children. Employment-centred support refers to measures intended to make it easier to combine work and care so that more mothers can enter paid employment.

²⁹ Ibid. Regioplan Beleidsonderzoek, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader. Een vergelijking tussen tien landen* [Family policy in an international framework. A comparison between ten countries], Amsterdam 2008, 96-99.

³⁰ This can be effected by scrapping the allowances for childcare and linking these to the child-linked budget. Parents can choose how they wish to spend this. See Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 85-98.

³¹ Leo Stevens, *Fiscaal gezinsbeleid* [Fiscal family policy], Deventer 2006, 43-44.

³² *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, **“Kostwinnersgezin is pakezel van de staat” [Breadwinner family is the State's beast of burden]**, 26 June 2009. The quoted difference in tax burden will increase from 84 to 119% through this Cabinet's intended abolition of

Parents would have a real freedom of choice about staying at home to bring up their children themselves if the Dutch government introduced a 'divided system' of tax treatment of families, so that taxes are levied according to the tax-bearing capacity of the family. At present, tax authorities tax the earnings of each individual parent or partner separately. This raises the question as to whether the policy of the Dutch government can be really considered as consistent - on the one hand it has adopted an idealistic package of measures to encourage the proper care of young people, but on the other it places so much emphasis on participation in the workforce by both parents that they are less able, or not sufficiently able, to give their children their individual care and attention.

Marriage and divorce

Another aspect of government policy is the particular attention it has drawn to the damaging effects of divorce on children in recent years. It has been encouraging divorce mediation and **stimulating parents'** awareness of the interests of the children when a relationship comes to an end; it has provided information and relationship courses on preventing divorce. The interests of the child will weigh much more heavily in divorce rulings than they have done in the past, in a government bid to improve the level of contact between the child and the parent who may be living outside the marital home.³³ At the beginning of 2009 the Dutch Promotion of Continued Parenting and Proper Divorce Act [*Wet bevordering voortgezet ouderschap en zorgvuldige scheiding*] came into effect, stipulating that parents who want to dissolve their marriage or registered partnership must draw up a parenting plan, outlining how they intend to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children. This law also makes divorce without the intervention of a court - **the 'flash divorce'** - impossible.

Postponing parenthood

As already noted in Chapter 1, demographic development in the Netherlands is characterised by a relatively low number of children. An international comparison shows that the average age of mothers at the birth of their first child is very late in the Netherlands. With Italy and

the possibility of transferring tax credits from the partner without an earned income to the partner with an earned income.

³³ Ministry of Youth and Family, *De kracht van het gezin* [The strength of the family]. *Nota gezinsbeleid 2008* [Memorandum on family policy 2008], 64-65.

Spain, the Netherlands is one of the leaders in the field where 'late parenthood' is concerned. In 1991 the average age of mothers having their first baby was 27.6 years in the Netherlands and by 2006 this had risen to 29.4 years.³⁴ The advanced age at which parents wish to have their first child often means that a latent desire to have children may not be fulfilled. Postponing children quite frequently proves to be an abandoning of the idea of having children, and this is one of the reasons why the Cabinet has introduced information campaigns in an attempt to promote greater awareness of the medical risks of postponing parenthood. Apart from that, there is a reluctance to influence choices any further in this domain.³⁵

2.2 Welfare policy for young people

The following section will examine the measures which affect children more immediately. First, there will be an examination of the legal framework (or the set of legal instruments), followed by an outline of policy in practice.

Legal framework

To start with, legislature set up the Child Protection Board [*Raad voor de Kinderbescherming*] (Book 1, Section 238 of the Dutch Civil Code [BW]). This Board is expected to act on behalf of children (for example in court) when this may be necessary. Generally speaking, the court has to decide if the authorities intend to interfere with parental authority. The set of instruments provides a series of more or less far-reaching measures.

The least intrusive is that of placing a child or young person under supervision (OTS). At the request of a parent, another person caring for the child, the Child Protection Board or the Public Prosecution Service, a family court can place a child under the supervision of a provincial Youth Care Office [*Bureau Jeugdzorg*] (Book 1, Section 254 BW). The parents in a case such as this retain parental authority over their child but must follow the instructions of the family guardian from the Youth Care Office. Sometimes, the child will be permitted to stay with its parents but in slightly more than half of the cases the child will be

³⁴ Raad voor de Volksgezondheid & Zorg, *Uitstel van ouderschap*, 9. See also, Section 1.2, footnote 11.

³⁵ Ministry of Youth and Family, *De kracht van het gezin*. See also Raad voor de Volksgezondheid & Zorg, *Uitstel van ouderschap*.

placed with a foster family or put in a children's home (placing in care), **but the Youth Care Office needs the court's authorisation to do this.**

In more serious cases, the Court can also relieve the parents of their parental authority at the request of the Child Protection Board or the Public Prosecution Service (Book 1, Section 266 BW). If very serious reproaches can be made against the parents, the court may then decide to discharge the parents from their parental authority (Book 1, Section 269 BW). In principle, the authority may then be vested in the other parent alone, or in the partner of the parent who has been relieved or discharged from parental authority and who is not a parent of the child. In all other cases, the Court will appoint a guardian from a Youth Care Office. In cases such as these, the Court will refer to case law on Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights from the European Court of Human Rights, which aims to protect private and family life.³⁶

The Youth Care Act [*Wet op de jeugdzorg*] primarily ensures that each province of the Netherlands has a Youth Care Office. In addition to the non-denominational youth care agencies, there are faith-based private organisations for youth care, which are financed and regulated on an equal footing with the other agencies.

Policy

In his programme entitled Every Opportunity for Every Child [*Alle kansen voor alle kinderen*]³⁷, Minister Rouvoet, the Minister for Youth and Family set out his views on a desirable young people's and family policy. We will now examine a number of points which could be significant for the theme of this study.

The spirit of this policy document implies that the Cabinet is not only setting itself the task of protecting children from domestic situations which are directly harmful to them, but the title in itself expresses the desire, as government, to ensure that all children are given good opportunities and the proper scope to develop their abilities. It seems as **if the role of the government is becoming more important 'not only**

³⁶ S.F.M. Wortmann and J. Duijvendijk-Brand, *Compendium van het personen- en familierecht* [Compendium of the law of persons and family law], ninth edition, Deventer 2005, 194-200.

³⁷ Ministry for Youth and Family, *Alle kansen voor alle kinderen. Programma voor Jeugd en Gezin 2007-2011*.

when children are in danger but also when they are being brought up in **deprived conditions**'.³⁸

The most important objectives that the government has set for itself include the elimination of waiting lists for youth care, the streamlining of cooperation between the various organisations, earlier identification of problems and a more effective approach to them. There must be adequate support for parenting, even if this means that parents are **obliged to accept help if 'the safety, health or development of their children is at risk'**.³⁹ The Cabinet is even considering drafting legislation which would make acceptance of help with parenting mandatory in certain situations. This legislation must also ensure that measures like OTS can be imposed at an earlier stage.⁴⁰

The 'one family, one plan' model is an important spearhead of the Cabinet's plans. The government's aim is to prevent families or family members from having to apply to various organisations and helpdesks with their different problems, running the great risk that these organisations will work at cross-purposes and draw up contradictory plans. The Every Opportunity for Every Child programme is imbued with a spirit of vigour. The appropriate organisation must intervene quickly, effectively and professionally when necessary, and the results must be monitored; the National Youth Monitor has been set up for this purpose.

The primary objective of the government is to adopt preventive measures so that problems can be prevented or, at least, so that they do not worsen to such an extent that a more radical approach becomes unavoidable. The Cabinet is focussing, for example, on improving young people's everyday surroundings or on targeted financial support but, at the same time, the government thinks that the best use must be made

³⁸ Raad voor de Volksgezondheid & Zorg, *Dilemma's op de drempel* [Dilemmas on the threshold], 7.

³⁹ Ministry for Youth and Family, *Alle kansen voor alle kinderen*, 7. The definition of health is based on that of the World Health Organisation: the state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. *Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organisation, 1946, Treaty Series 1946, 16, last amended Treaty Series 1998, 255 and corrected Treaty Series 2006, 73.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 26-29. The plans for mandatory parenting support can be found mainly in Parliamentary Papers no. 28684, on placing under supervision in Parliamentary Papers no. 31015.

of the inherent strength of families, their wider family networks and local communities as well. The Cabinet wants to promote Family Group Conferences, which can examine how these family networks can be called on to help solve problems.⁴¹

Policy instruments

A central place in Cabinet policy has been reserved for the Youth and Family Centres (CJG), which local authorities will be required to set up. A start has already been made in many areas and the aim is to create a national network of CJGs by 2011. The primary aim of a CJG is to offer families or parents an easily accessible point of contact where they can bring all their questions and problems and where they can be provided with coordinated support. The intention is to streamline existing, complicated programmes of organisations and agencies, because the government wants to remove barriers and certainly not to create even more obstacles.⁴² Broadly speaking, the task of the CJGs will be twofold. First, each CJG must provide parenting support for parents who are experiencing problems raising their children, and health care for young people must be provided in or by a CJG or at least be coordinated by it. Arrangements have been made with local authorities to have provincial Youth Care Offices establish outpost clinics in the centres, and arrangements have been made which are intended to tighten collaboration between local and provincial authorities in this field.⁴³

Another instrument in the early identification of parenting and health problems is the Electronic Child Database (EKD), which is mainly a **project to digitalise existing children's records** for the youth healthcare sector. Youth health care agencies make a risk assessment for each child, and all the data concerning a child's physical and mental health which could be possibly relevant must be registered in this database. The target is to have the EKD operational throughout the Netherlands by the end of 2009, and legislation will make the database mandatory in due course. When a child starts school, the school will take over the registration activities from the Child Health Centre.

The At-risk register for juveniles who may be in difficulties is a less far-reaching instrument and is primarily intended to prevent the various

⁴¹ Ministry for Youth and Family, *Alle kansen voor alle kinderen*, 4-9.

⁴² This could prove to be difficult in practice.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 14-17.

care organisations from working at cross-purposes. The At-risk register is an electronic system which can be used by social workers and the police to register any young people they have been in contact with. If a young person has already been registered in the system by another organisation or organisations, the social worker or police officer receives a message giving the contact details of the person who made the initial report. This enables social workers and police officers to contact each other more easily and – if necessary – they can coordinate their efforts when tackling the problems of the juvenile in question. This At-risk register only contains the data of children or juveniles who have been identified with specific problems and, unlike the EKD, will not include entries for every young person. The At-risk register is expected to be required by law by the end of 2009. A national guideline and a Privacy for Youth and Family Helpdesk will be set up as a precaution in case these measures result in too great an infringement of privacy.⁴⁴ The guidelines and the statutory criteria will probably be amended because of parliamentary criticism of the sweeping ambitions of the government.

The Cabinet is particularly satisfied with the multi-disciplinary cooperation in the Pupil Support Advisory Teams (ZATs). These are consultative groups in which professionals from the various sectors such as youth care, youth healthcare, school attendance agencies and the police agree on a coordinated approach to the problems of a particular child so that families are not referred from one agency to another in **their search for help. It is the Cabinet's intention to be able to make contact with all children in all age groups in this manner.** Initial responsibility for the over-fours will be with the school; for younger children the CJG seems the most suitable agency.⁴⁵

In addition, obstacles to becoming a foster parent must be removed as far as possible. Therefore foster parents get more financial allowances, and a stronger position in the relations with youth care organisations. If a child has to be taken into care, placement with a foster family is **preferable to a children's home, and when a child is placed in care,** there must be some indication as to whether it can return to its own family within two years and, if this is not possible, who will take care of the child and where the child will be placed. The importance of a stable

⁴⁴ Ibid. 18-19.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 17.

and healthy home situation for a child takes precedence over the interests of the parents in bringing up the child themselves.⁴⁶

Other policy proposals

More programmes for Early and Pre-school education must be made generally available to eliminate any language deficiency problems which children may have before they start primary school. It means that special programmes of play activities must be offered at day nurseries and day care facilities to teach Dutch to children who need this. The aim is to reach as many children as possible with these programmes so that they are not hampered by their lack of Dutch when they start school.⁴⁷

The Cabinet wants to actively continue its fight against child abuse. Efforts are being concentrated on parenting support (through the CJGs) as a preventive measure; cases must be notified at an earlier stage than at present and the approach will be intensified.⁴⁸

For young people threatening to drift into crime, campuses will be established where the emphasis will be on re-education, training and employability skills, to act as an incentive to finding work or further training. In extreme cases, these facilities can become compulsory for young people exhibiting delinquent behaviour.⁴⁹

As already discussed in Chapter 1, the government has seen that the **'social parenting environment' is very important for parents, but this setting seems to be increasingly unavailable**, so the government intends to formulate a policy to promote ways of tackling this problem. Initially, the government wants the CJGs to create opportunities for group sessions on this subject, in addition to giving advice on parenting, where parents can discuss specific themes with other parents and provide support for each other. The government also attaches great importance to what it calls a National Parenting Debate in families, schools, neighbourhoods and communities and wants to encourage this, as well as child-friendly public spaces and affordable housing.⁵⁰ The possible role of the churches has not been mentioned in any of the policy papers.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 6-7. The plans relating to encouraging placement in foster families can be found in Parliamentary Papers no. 31279.

⁴⁷ Ministry for Youth and Family, *Alle kansen voor alle kinderen*, 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 33-34.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 36-37.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Youth and Family, *De kracht van het gezin*, 58-67

Youth healthcare

One final remark about youth healthcare, which is comprised of various organisations in the Netherlands, such as the Community Health Authorities (GGD), whose services are accessible to almost all children: most GGDs run local child health centres, which most pre-school children attend regularly for a check-up by the doctor or nurse there. The school doctor service regularly visits school-age children at their school.

2.3 Conclusion

Although the Dutch government is carefully avoiding making any such suggestion, the conclusion from the above outline must be that the policy of the current Balkenende IV Cabinet is leading to an increase of government influence in the family domain. Parents can no longer apply for a divorce without court intervention, and they have to draw up a parenting plan, which is just one of the ways of trying to limit the seriously damaging effects of divorce on children. Many forms of financial family support are available, but the tax regime discourages a parent from staying at home to look after the children.

The Cabinet certainly has great ambitions in the field of young people and parenting. It increasingly sees its task as one of guaranteeing opportunities for the development of all children, and recognises the need to promote the provision of parenting support and even make it compulsory where necessary. It wants to prevent the various youth care organisations from working at cross purposes so that no children slip through the net. Instruments include the establishment of a national network of CJGs, the introduction of the At-risk register for juveniles and the EKD; the courts must also be given powers to place a child under the supervision of child welfare services more easily. The energy that the government is putting into its care of children and young people may receive positive approval but, at the same time, it is debatable whether the possibilities of the state are not being overestimated and the harsh reality of the actual situation is not being simplified.

3. Family policy in Sweden, the United States and Germany

This chapter covers the main outlines of family policy in three western countries, namely Sweden, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, in that order. By describing these three countries, we hope to gain an insight into the manner and degree of government involvement in families and provide a model framework to help make a comparison of the policies in the three countries. This can then be used to enable a clearer formulation of what the SGP understands as good family policy.

The comparison in this study has been restricted to a limited number of western countries – not because countries in other parts of the world have nothing of interest to offer in this field, but because the scope of this study may only be a restricted one. The key objective is to reveal a number of parallel patterns in government policies on the family, patterns which are predominantly identifiable in western countries. Another reason for this approach is that more information is available on policy in western countries; readers from other countries will be able to draw their own comparisons with the government policy, or the situation vis-à-vis family policy in their own country.

3.1 Three models for government policy

International scientific literature on family policy often divides policies in North West European and North American countries into three categories: the social democratic or egalitarian model (in Scandinavia, in particular), the liberal or non-interventionist model (Anglo-Saxon countries) and the corporatist or traditional model (Germany, France and sometimes the Netherlands). A short description of the main features of each of these three models is given below.⁵¹

⁵¹ Cheal, *Families in today's world*, 137-142; A.H. Gauthier, *The State and the Family. A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries*, Oxford 1996; Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge 1990, 26-29; Katja Forssén, *Child poverty and family policy in OECD countries*, Luxembourg Income Study 1998, 3-8.

The *social democratic model* is geared towards the creation of equal development opportunities for everyone and reserves a very important role for social equality, particularly between men and women. The government is allocated a predominant role in attaining this objective. Social legislation in states such as these is marked by a certain sort of **'universality': its aim is not so much to alleviate the problems of a specific group** (as is often seen in the liberal model) or to encourage a particular type of cohabitation, as is the case in many corporatist countries, but it is the creation of equal opportunities for each individual in society which has greater relevance. In these countries paramount importance is attached to both men and women reaching their maximum potential and participating in employment, and the **state's expenditure on childcare and other forms of child-related social security and tax benefits is substantial.**⁵²

The rationale underpinning the *liberal model* takes the contradiction between state and market as its basic principle, allocating the smallest possible role to the state; this implies that the liberal model does not, in fact, have a family policy as such. Dependency on the state for any form of help, including financial help, is actively discouraged. The prevention and solution of social problems are regarded as being, primarily, the responsibility of society itself and not of the state. There is great faith in the operation of free market processes and as much as possible is left to this mechanism. Social politics often focus on solving the specific problems of certain groups which the government feels particularly responsible for.

Last in this series of theoretical models is the *corporatist model*. This model describes a system which provides a certain social minimum or basic income which everyone is entitled to. The standard of social provision in this model can be ranked somewhere between the two previous models, on the understanding that the corporatist system is set up in such a way that there are as few obstacles as possible to the continued existence of traditional types of community (like the family); sometimes they are even stimulated. A particular feature of this system is the encouragement given to the practice of one parent staying at home to take care of the children. In countries which can be classified as corporatist, most trust is placed not in the state, or the market, but

⁵² See for a comparative overview of government expenditure on family support Hooglander et al., *Goedezinde politiek*, 38-51.

largely in institutions and social networks, like the family, which are cherished.

Current developments call for a general remark to be included at this point about birth control politics. In the western world many governments are concerned about the increasing ageing of the population. Although higher birth rates are considered desirable, there is almost no western country with a policy which encourages the birth of more children. The decision to have children, it seems, is still viewed as a private one, which the government should have no part in. Particularly **Germany and France (two 'corporatist' countries)** have introduced explicitly pro-birth policies by giving extra financial stimuli to parents on the birth of a child. There are, however, many other countries which have introduced measures which could incidentally increase the birth-rate, such as provisions for childcare and parental leave, without this being the primary intention.⁵³

In the next three sections, examples of each model in an appropriate national environment will be discussed. First the organisation of family policy in Sweden will be discussed, a social democratic country, which has, as will become evident, a central role for the state. A description of family policy in the United States (US) will follow, which is an example of the liberal model, and then the corporatist model, as shown in the family policy in Germany, will be illustrated.

3.2 Swedish family policy

The Swedish government has adopted an active family policy, based on the following principles which will be described briefly. First, for the most part, the Swedes see raising children as a collective responsibility. The general perception in politics and society is that society must ensure that children can develop into autonomous individuals; the government sees its task as not only guaranteeing the safety of children but also of ensuring their wellbeing. This is a paradigm which can explain much of the family legislation in Sweden.⁵⁴ The outcome of the generous financial support given to families is that the cost of bringing

⁵³ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader* [Family policy in an international framework], Amsterdam 2008, 25-26.

⁵⁴ Joan E. Durrant and Gregg M. Olsen, 'Parenting and Public Policy. Contextualizing the Swedish Corporal Punishment Ban', *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 1997 (4), 19, 443-461.

up children is largely borne collectively;⁵⁵ this ties in closely with the target of levelling incomes, another important socio-economic objective of Swedish government policy.

The Swedish government has also taken on the task of ensuring that there are equal opportunities for men and women in the job market and that any conflicts which arise because of the combination of work and childcare are, to a great extent, avoided. Given these aspirations, the Swedish government makes certain that childcare is available on a widespread scale, supplemented by extensive statutory provisions for parental leave, on the principle that both parents should share the care responsibilities for their children as far as possible (dual-earner/dual-caretaker model).

Family policy in general

An extensive framework of government measures has been implemented as a result, the outlines of which will be discussed below. First there is a general package of financial allowances for families, for example an extra **generous payment of €111 per month for every child. In addition,** numerous extra and specific supplements are paid, in particular for large families, low-income families and families with disabled children. The state also acts as a guarantor underwriting child maintenance payments to the children of divorced parents.⁵⁶

The comprehensive system of employment leave for parents has already been mentioned which is widely used by both mothers and fathers in Sweden. Each parent is also entitled to 240 days paid leave a year, 180 of which can be transferred to the other parent. Fathers can also take up ten days leave on the birth of their child, and there is also an entitlement to 120 days paid parental leave per year for each sick child. Parents are also entitled to 120 days paid leave per year for each sick child.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 117-119.

⁵⁶ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 121; Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, *Swedish Family Policy Fact Sheet*, 2005, <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/sweden.html>, last visited on 20 June 2009.

⁵⁷ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 117-121. Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, *Swedish Family Policy Fact Sheet*, 2005.

As already mentioned, the government regulates many aspects of child care. Every child is entitled to day care from the age of one until it starts school, and to pre-school and after-school child care from then on until it is twelve. The government has numerous regulations in place to safeguard high standards of quality in the provision of child care, including the quality of staff.⁵⁸

The Swedish marriage legislation can be characterized as progressive. As in The Netherlands, it is possible for same sex couples to marry and also to adopt children. Furthermore, the Swedish legislation provides a kind of registered partnership, and acknowledges unmarried cohabitation. Married couples have the possibility to divorce when they want to do so.⁵⁹

In terms of health care objectives, the aim of the Swedish government is to ensure that each child can grow up as healthily as possible, and that everyone receives state-funded health care. Pre-school children must attend health clinics regularly until they start school, where they then have regular health checks from health visitors.⁶⁰

Welfare

It has already been stated that the Swedish government views itself as **partly responsible for the wellbeing of the nation's children**. Legal provisions define every child's right to care, security and a good upbringing. Each child must be treated as an individual deserving of respect. A child may not be subject to corporal punishment or to humiliating treatment. These two provisions have been included in legislation for a twofold objective. First they define the responsibilities of the parents (or carers) and the rights of the child, but they also imply that the government has a legitimate role in taking over these obligations to the child should the parents fail to fulfil their parental responsibilities.

⁵⁸ Durrant and Olsen, 'Parenting and Public Policy', 19-20; Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 117-121; Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, *Swedish Family Policy Fact Sheet*, 2005.. See also Research Department of the CDA, *The Scandinavian Model: not as desirable as it seems*, The Hague 2007, 43-61, which studied Swedish policy on day-care facilities to see whether this kind of welfare state model would be appropriate in the Netherlands; the conclusion was that is not advisable.

⁵⁹ www.sweden.gov.se

⁶⁰ Durrant and Olsen, 'Parenting and Public Policy', 16-18.

Local authorities are responsible for welfare policy in Sweden; the aim is to ensure and safeguard the best development of children. Child welfare policies focus primarily on social assistance and not only on protection.⁶¹ The Swedish system of child welfare work is characterised by the high level of trust which is placed in the support packages provided by welfare workers and in the positive results of government intervention. Intervention without parental consent is allowed in cases of abuse, neglect, a relationship break-down between the parents and very bad – even criminal – behaviour on the part of the child, if, in short, the home situation involves definite risks to the physical or psychological development of the child. Child abuse includes more than serious physical abuse. Even minor forms of corporal punishment can result in government intervention. Psychological abuse, such as the use of systematic verbal humiliation, must also be prevented. The term child abuse covers exploitation as well, including doing abnormal tasks in the household. Excess alcohol consumption by one parent is also regarded as a risk factor because it can lead to inadequate care of the child.⁶²

The Swedish government has already adopted various preventive measures to promote the welfare of families and children. Many towns and cities have family centres, where a range of organisations involved in childcare and youth health care can combine their help to support families and strengthen social networks. Every local authority is required to have consultants on hand for families to refer to, and some areas have programmes for parenting support in place.⁶³ The clinics attended regularly by pre-school children also offer counselling on parenting and parenthood, providing parents specifically with information on the law banning corporal punishment.⁶⁴ Sweden also has various regulations to ensure that problems related to growing up and parenting are identified at an early stage and tackled. These include the existence of a legal obligation on everyone who is professionally involved with children to report any concerns which might warrant government intervention. As soon as a report of this nature is made, welfare workers start an immediate investigation. If

⁶¹ Sven Hesse and Bo Vinnerljung, *Child Welfare in Sweden. An overview*, sa, 5-7, <http://www.sws.soton.ac.uk/cwab/Guide/ICWKR.htm>, last visited on 20 June 2009.

⁶² *Ibid.* 7, 18-19.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 9-10.

⁶⁴ Durrant and Olsen, 'Parenting and Public Policy', 21-23.

necessary, help is offered to the parents and their child or children, often by welfare workers but also by voluntary workers. Help consists of advice or therapy sessions, but sometimes it is necessary to receive a child into care and place it in a foster family or care home. In both cases the government exercises strict supervision: for example, parents are absolutely forbidden from allowing their child to stay somewhere else on their own initiative without first informing the authorities. Very often foster families are classed as institutions so that the comprehensive set of regulations applicable to institutions can also be declared applicable to a foster family.⁶⁵

3.3 US family policy

As already indicated, government family policy in the United States of America is an example of the liberal model. Its basic principle is that as much as possible should be left to the market (and to other private or independent institutions) and that little government interference in the family is made. On a smaller scale, certain help programmes are available for particular groups with special problems. As the following will illustrate, the American government certainly holds distinctive views on marriage and the family in certain fields.

One complicating factor in describing a 'single' American family policy is the structure of the US as a federal union. Some matters are arranged at federal government level, but most measures relating to the family are implemented at state level, sometimes with federal government financing, so that this brief outline can only give a very general sketch of American family policy with the comment that not all of the features apply in all American states.

Family policy in general

At federal level, universal financial support for families is almost non-existent, although there have been some tax concessions for people with children for some years. Various support programmes are available for families who comply with a set of stringent requirements (very often a certain maximum income). The most important of these programmes is the *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families* (TANF) programme which is run by the states with money from the federal government. TANF basically offers financial support to poor families, but it is also intended

⁶⁵ Hessele and Vinnerljung, *Child Welfare in Sweden*, 10-16.

to help families get back on their feet as quickly as possible and to depend on government help no longer. As soon as someone has found work and is generating their own income, even if it is no higher than the TANF payments, the aim of the support has been achieved. Single mothers are an important target group for this programme; they are also expected to find paid work and support themselves once more.⁶⁶ One remarkable fact is that the government is trying to reduce the number of people dependent on financial aid by encouraging any single people among them to marry, so that it will be easier for them to make ends meet.⁶⁷ Another anti-poverty programme is *Earned Income Tax Credits* (EITC); these provide support for families with children on a low income but double-income families are less eligible for this type of support because these credits are based on the family income.⁶⁸

The arrangements made by the government with regard to parental leave are remarkably few, with only one at federal level: companies with more than 50 employees are obliged to offer 12 weeks unpaid leave for maternity care, the birth of a child or a child with medical problems. Some states have supplementary arrangements; five states guarantee a short period of paid leave.⁶⁹

There is much more government intervention in childcare, both at state and federal level. Help with the costs of childcare is offered primarily to low-income families, which is in line with the above policy of encouraging people, including single mothers, to generate their own income.⁷⁰

The government in the US generally views marriage as an institution which should be protected. Federal legislation (the *Defense of Marriage Act*, in particular) is explicitly based on marriage between a man and a

⁶⁶ Cheal, *Families in Today's World*, 140-141.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 143.

⁶⁸ Rachel Henneck, *Family Policy in the US, Japan, Germany, Italy and France Parental Leave, Child Benefits/Family Allowances, Child Care, Marriage/Cohabitation, and Divorce*, Council on Contemporary Families 2003, <http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org/subtemplate.php?ext=InternationalFamilyPolicy&t=briefingPapers>, last visited on 23 June 2009.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; Petra Hoelscher, *A thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty*, Dortmund 2004, 63.

woman. The Act also says that states are not bound to recognise homosexual marriages as such, although they may be solemnised in some states. In some states unmarried cohabitation is illegal. And no-fault divorces are not available in some states.⁷¹

One of the goals of the TANF programme referred to above is the reduction of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and the number of single-parent families, for example by requiring the noncustodial parent (generally the father) to pay a sum of money to the state, part of which will be paid to the custodial parent (usually the mother).⁷² Another provision is *Child Support Enforcement* (CSE), which aims to compel the noncustodial parent to pay some form of child support. In addition, the federal government supports various programmes to help preserve marriages by providing marriage guidance counselling and relationship training.⁷³

Welfare policy

Unlike Swedish welfare policy, with its universal approach to the field of welfare policy, policy in the US is made up of different kinds of programmes, all focused on specific problems in specific groups. Most government attention is concentrated on preventing and tackling domestic violence and child abuse. Another important principle is the goal of maintaining the family as a social unit as far as possible. Generally the states are responsible for implementing welfare policy in the US, assisted by federal government subsidies and the programmes are usually offered by local governments or private institutions. The private sector is an influential stakeholder in the US in the field of welfare in general, and youth welfare in particular, and often works from a faith-based background. These organisations receive active government support, primarily through subsidies, and without having to comply with innumerable detailed provisions. The public and private agencies frequently work together, coordinated by the public agency.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Henneck, *Family Policy in the US*; Cheal, *Families in Today's World*, 144.

⁷² Henneck, *Family Policy in the US*.

⁷³ US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Strategic Plan 2007-2012*, 94-95.

⁷⁴ Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn, 'United States', in: Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn (ed.), *Family Change and Family Policies in Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States*, Oxford 1997, 305-421, there 389-392; HHS, *Strategic Plan*, 98-103; the Child Welfare Information Gateway gives much information on American welfare policy at <http://www.childwelfare.gov>.

Many parenting support programmes are available in the US. Some are meant for participation by a wider group (like the *Parents as Teachers* programme) but most are directed at specific problems.⁷⁵ One well-known programme which is centred more directly on children is *Head Start*. Its aim is to support pre-school children from low-income families so that by the time they are ready to start school they have developed adequate social and cognitive skills.⁷⁶

The most important objective of American welfare policy is tackling domestic violence and child abuse or neglect. According to the definitions under federal legislation, the latter occurs when a child suffers serious harm, such as mistreatment or the withholding of necessary medical treatment and it is hoped that various information and support programmes will be able to prevent this. Emphasis is on at-risk families, such as single, very young mothers or families with a history of incidents involving risk to a child. A number of states (roughly twenty) have legislation in place which stipulates that all cases of child abuse or neglect must be reported to the authorities. If enough reports are made, then an investigation is started and any necessary help offered.⁷⁷

A child may be taken into care and placed with a foster family or in a care home if it would no longer be wise to allow it to remain at home with its parent or parents. This decision is only taken after every effort has been made to improve the home situation. As fostering is a more preferable option than placement in a care home, the government has started a campaign to recruit more families as foster families.⁷⁸

3.4 German family policy

Great value is attached to the traditional family as the social unit in the Federal Republic of Germany. Its family policy has long been characterised by its strong emphasis on the breadwinner model but this perspective has altered of late partly because increasing the birth rate has become one of its objectives. The difficulty that mothers find in

⁷⁵ www.childwelfare.gov.

⁷⁶ HHS, *Strategic Plan*, 99.

⁷⁷ Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Fact sheets 2007-2008.

⁷⁸ <http://www.childwelfare.gov>; HHS, *Strategic Plan*, 98-99.

combining work and care tasks is regarded as an important reason why birth figures are so low, and measures have been introduced to make it easier for mothers to participate in the workforce. The German government has also introduced financial support for each child in a bid to increase birth rates.⁷⁹

Family policy in general

Germany has a combination of universal financial support and specific measures for specific poorer groups. For families with children, there are various child allowances generally available and fiscally there are also some tax concessions, the most important of which is an allowance of **€154 per child per month**. As already outlined, the objective underpinning some of these allowances is to encourage families to have more children, but various schemes for families with a low income have also been introduced to combat child poverty. Single parents receive an extra allowance if the other parent does not pay the child maintenance.⁸⁰

There is also a parents' allowance [*Elterngeld*] available, which is a compensatory payment for parents who work no more than 30 hours a week so that they can look after their child or children at home. Many parents follow the breadwinner model because of the generous and comprehensive package of paid and unpaid leave schemes.⁸¹ Until six years ago the German government had no policy focused on making childcare widely accessible, but recent years have seen the start of efforts to expand childcare so that it is at least available for every pre-school child. Tax concessions are also available for families and aim to make childcare less expensive.⁸²

Same-sex marriages have now been legalised in Germany but are not on a completely equal footing with heterosexual marriages; homosexual couples are not allowed to adopt children and do not have the same tax concessions as married heterosexual couples. Neither are these tax

⁷⁹ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 25-26, 63, 82-84. The website of the *Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend* provides very useful information. <http://www.bmfsfj.de>.

⁸⁰ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 83-84; Hoelscher, *A thematic study*, 81-86.

⁸¹ Regioplan, *Gezinsbeleid in een internationaal kader*, 83-84.

⁸² *Ibid.* 64, 84.

concessions available to cohabiting couples although their families have the same entitlements as families in heterosexual marriages in every other way.⁸³

Welfare policy

An important principle of German welfare policy is that of subsidiarity. According to this doctrine, the government can only step in when the efforts of families and private agencies have not produced the desired results. As much as possible should be organised at lower government levels and any intervention by higher government levels, if necessary, should only be of a supplementary nature, so it is not surprising that most welfare care is provided by the local authorities in Germany. Private agencies also play an important role and the federal government often only sets up the underlying and financial conditions.⁸⁴ Child welfare in Germany is often managed by a combination of public and private institutions, sometimes with a faith-based background. The statutory provisions mainly apply to the public youth care agencies. Although preventing and eliminating domestic violence and child abuse is an important policy objective, government policy has a wider remit: the government aims to promote youth welfare in a broader sense, illustrative of which is that Germany, like Sweden, has banned corporal punishment of children by law.⁸⁵

The first article of *Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz* [Youth Welfare Act] (KJHG) contains a concise description of the German perception of welfare policy. It first defines the right of all children to develop their full potential and to be properly parented; the law then goes on to state that parents not only have the right but the obligation to rear their children. It concludes by defining the role of youth welfare services, which is to help young people in their development, to help parents with parenting where necessary and to protect children; this is a perception which envisages youth welfare as an aid in establishing a family-friendly and child-friendly social environment. This reflects the view of the German legislators that the government has an important role to play but still wishes to protect the family as a social unit when it

⁸³ Henneck, *Family Policy in the US*.

⁸⁴ <http://www.bmfsfj.de>.

⁸⁵ ChildONEurope Secretariat, *Survey on the role of parents and the support from the Governments in the EU*, European Network of National Observatories on Childhood 2007, 34.

is implementing its policies. The focus is not on the individual as it is in a country like Sweden.

The KJHG also stipulates that there must be ample opportunity for diverse schemes of parenting support to be developed. Germany pays particular attention to helping parents to solve problems in the family and it has developed, or is still developing, a wide range of programmes and institutions with this in mind. Programmes are available for certain problem issues, while others are more general in nature and target a wider group, with specific courses and programmes to provide parents with useful advice about housekeeping and parenting. If a family breaks down, more intensive programmes of a more intrusive nature are available. The *Sozial-Pädagogische Familienhilfe* [Social pedagogical family help] (SPFH) programme, for example, is offered by youth agencies if a family is experiencing problems.⁸⁶ The *Entwicklung und Chancen junger Menschen in sozialer Brennpunkten* [Development and chances for young people in deprived areas] programme (E&C) is also available in deprived neighbourhoods, and is an attempt to bundle social services and activities together to increase opportunities for young people.⁸⁷

In Germany, like the Netherlands, there are calls for a more vigorous approach to the phenomenon of domestic violence. The government is trying to stimulate cooperation between the various organisations involved in this field and aims to make its approach to cases of domestic violence more systematic and professional so that more problems are actually helped by welfare intervention.⁸⁸

The KJHG also makes it possible for youth care services to remove children from their parents in Germany if the children are at immediate

⁸⁶ Joachim Wieler, 'Social Pedagogical Family Help in Germany: New Wine in Old Vessels or New Vessels for Old Wine?', in: John Canavan, Pat Dolan and John Pinkerton, ed., *Family support. Direction from diversity*, Portland 2000, 57-78; <http://www.bmfsfj.de>.

⁸⁷ Hoelscher, *A thematic study*, 86-87 For more examples of programmes see ChildONEurope Secretariat, *Survey*, 22-40, and <http://www.bmfsfj.de>.

⁸⁸ Nationales Zentrum Frühe Hilfen [National Centre for Early Help], *Analyse Kinderschutz. Lernen aus problematischen Kinderschutzverläufen* [Analysis of Child Protection. Learning from Problematic Child Protection Cases], Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend [Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth] 2008.

risk; a prior court order is not required in all cases. When a child is taken into care, it is placed with a foster family or in a care home.

3.5 Conclusion

The following table (Table 3.1, page 44) will act as a kind of summary in this closing paragraph, illustrating the most important aspects of family policy in the three countries under discussion. First the more general principles are listed and then the interpretation of these principles in relation to the role or task of the government in various aspects of family policy is defined.

The table illustrates that the government plays a significant role in a social democratic country like Sweden. Government intervention is considerable in the domain of financial and employment-centred family support, as well as in welfare. In a liberal country like the US, government intervention is more restrained. There is little government regulation in the field of financial and employment-centred family support and welfare is left to private organisations wherever possible, although it seems that the government does wish to guarantee at least a certain minimum level of welfare. The role of the US-government in the field of child protection is described as narrow, because the definition of child abuse is considerably narrower in the US. It means that cases which are classed as child abuse in Sweden and Germany (which pursue policies of promoting child welfare in the broadest sense) are not classed as such in the US. The degree of government intervention in Germany, as an example of a corporatist government, lies somewhere between the other two countries. Germany has fewer universal provisions in the field of financial and work-directed support and welfare care than in Sweden, but has more than the US, and has additional specific provisions for certain groups.

Although there are apparent differences in all fields of family policy between the three countries in our description, it is noticeable that governments generally feel responsible for a certain minimum level of legislation and policy concerning families. In the US, government help is available for poor families and there, too, domestic violence is regarded as so unacceptable that government intervention in the family sphere is justified to prevent further violence.

Despite the widely-held perception in the western world that governments should be neutral, it is particularly interesting to see that a certain normative concept of family life underpins the family policy in each of the countries in our discussion. In Sweden it is the idea that each individual must be able to develop to its full potential and this is the reason why mothers are so explicitly encouraged to take part in employment and why opportunities for individual children are so closely guarded. The US places great emphasis on the value of marriage and the family as a social unit and this is also the case in Germany, although there is a greater emphasis on the breadwinner model.

Table 3.1 Overview of family policy in three western countries

<i>Land</i> → <i>Policy aspect</i> ↓	Sweden	United States	Germany
Principle	State and individual	Market and institutions	Institutions (family)
Youth welfare	Individual child-centred	Family-centred	Family-centred
Marriage legislation	Progressive	Conservative	Moderate
Financial support	Much and universal	Little and specific	Much, universal and specific
Parental leave	Major role for state	Minor role for state	Major role for state
Child care	Major role for state	Moderate role for state	Moderate role for state
Parenting support	Major role for state; universal policy	State creates preconditions; primarily specific policy	State creates preconditions; universal and specific policies
Child protection	Major role for state; broad definition	Minor role for state; narrow definition	Major role for state; broad definition
Foster care	Major role for state	Moderate role for state	Moderate role for state
Role of private agencies	Small	Large	Moderate

4. The SGP's perception of the family and the role of government

This chapter focuses on the principles which the SGP wishes to formulate in response to the issues raised in this paper. First we will **discuss the party's perception of the family; we will only itemise the main points**, since the study *Goedgezinde politiek* (Family-friendly politics)⁸⁹ has already examined the subject in greater depth. After this, the SGP perception of government and its role will be addressed. In the first instance, the focus will be on some general points, before the discussion moves on to a conclusion which will examine, in particular, the question of the extent to which the government should intervene in its attempts to guide family life along lines it views as desirable.

4.1 The value of the family

The SGP sees marriage, according to the **principles of God's Creation**,⁹⁰ as the foundation of the family. The Bible regards marriage as a lifelong covenant made between one man and one woman, with the principal aim of helping and supporting each other. Another purpose of marriage is the bearing and rearing of children. On relationships within the family, the Bible says that the father, mother and children must be kind to each other and that family members should be loyal. The children must also obey their parents but the parents still have a duty to exercise their responsibility in a loving and caring way.

We could say that God in His Word has, in fact, given us a 'manual' for His Creation. One of these instructions was the regulation of marriage between one man and one woman so that human beings, whom God created as man and as woman, could make full use of their talents in accordance with the intentions of the Creator. The basic problem of our individualised western society is that these wise instructions are often ignored.

This is one of the reasons **for the SGP's conviction that making family relationships vigorous and healthy would have positive, social effects on society.** The family is the ideal place to bring up children - by parents whose parental love ensures that they have the best interests of their

⁸⁹ H.J. Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 52-74.

⁹⁰ Genesis 2:20-24.

children at heart. Children can be given the necessary norms and values which allow them to function in society. Husband and wife are **dependent on each other's faithfulness, help and support**. Children are dependent on the care of their parents but, as parents become older, they in their turn become dependent on their children. In essence, the family is the place where the most elementary needs for support are fulfilled.

But these positive social effects produced by families which function well are **not the SGP's primary motivation for promoting good family life**. Against the background of the Bible history we have just sketched, the SGP attaches an own intrinsic value to the family, one which is **founded on God's ordinance**. The SGP, therefore, has reason to honour the family, even if the positive effects of the family on society are not immediately apparent.⁹¹

4.2 The task of the government

The principle is that governmental authority is founded on the government as an institution established by God. **So God's Word must be supreme** in the measure of government activities.⁹² It is important to note that, after the Fall, a function of the government was to restrict the dissoluteness of man who is naturally inclined to evil.⁹³ The other side to this argument is that the people in government may also be imperfect so not everything can be entrusted to governments without restriction. Another constantly recurring biblical fact is that the government has been given the task of being a shield for the weaker members of society. Citizens who cannot find help with the necessities of life must be able to fall back on the government.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Compare Lieke Werkman, *'Kwetsbare identiteiten'* [Vulnerable identities], and Gerrit de Kruijf et al., *'De vrijheid van de familie. Een oecumenische bijdrage aan een Europese discussie'* [The freedom of the family. An ecumenical contribution to a European discussion], in: Gerrit de Kruijf and Petruschka Schaafsma (ed.), *Meer dan een optelsom. Kanttekeningen bij de waarde van het gezin* [More than an addition. Comments on the value of the family], Kampen 2008, 147-160 and 13-39.

⁹² Romans 13:1-7.

⁹³ Romans 13:4-5; Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis, article 36; H.F. Massink et al., *Dienstbaar tot gerechtigheid. SGP-visie op aard en omvang van de overheidstaak* [In service of justice. SGP's views on the nature and scope of the government's task], Houten 1993, 77, 81.

⁹⁴ Massink et al., *Dienstbaar tot gerechtigheid*, 78.

The SGP is convinced that government policies cannot be ideologically neutral. Even those who say they are supporters of a neutral government often appear to actually adhere to ideological principles in politics, for example when arguing in favour of individual autonomy and self-development. The SGP opts for a Christian value system as the basis for politics. This does not alter the fact that, **in the SGP's view, the government must take a more reserved approach and not be intensely involved in all social areas; it must not overlook the own responsibilities of social relationships and of citizens. We will first briefly examine the Christian foundation of politics and then we will discuss the limits of government policy.**⁹⁵

Justice

In 1993 the research department of the SGP published its memorandum entitled *In the Service of Justice (Dienstbaar tot gerechtigheid)*,⁹⁶ which **defined the SGP's view of the government's role. The key words are 'public justice': the Ten Commandments are taken as norm. One of the consequences is, on the one hand, that the SGP thinks that the government should take a certain normative, ethical framework as its starting point and, on the other, that the word 'public' implies that the responsibility of the government is restricted to a number of, but not all, public social fields, as already mentioned. The SGP is convinced that the biblical norms and values should also guide the government in the way it governs and it should apply these norms to public life for two reasons, namely their universal applicability and God's ownership of His entire Creation. As a consequence, freedom does not mean that everyone has the right to decide for him or herself what they do or don't do. The principal, and also realistic, notion that every human is inclined to evil contradicts this. Freedom will only develop to its full advantage if the inherent good in freedom is also pursued, and it may never be seen as separate from responsibility. The fact that man is a communal being runs counter to taking the autonomous individual as the starting point for policy.**

It is therefore legitimate, and even obligatory, for the government to exert its influence on choices in order to promote compliance with the values expressed in the Bible. The way this influence is wielded and its

⁹⁵ Ibid. 74-75.

⁹⁶ Massink et al., *Dienstbaar tot gerechtigheid*.

extent depend on the responsibility borne by the government in a particular domain, as we will discuss below.

Scope

The fact that the SGP opts for a normative framework as the starting point for government policy certainly does not mean that it would like government policy to extend into as many areas as possible. On the contrary, the SGP is very well aware that the tasks and options of the State are limited: social questions must be left to other institutions as far as possible. **Any sketch of the SGP's view of the extent of government responsibility should include some notes on its historical background, without necessarily transferring the positions taken at the time into the modern context.**

Since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the freedom and **welfare of a State's citizens have been increasingly seen as the** responsibility of the State. States in Western Europe generally began to abolish institutions which restricted the freedom of the individual, and to take over the welfare responsibilities from the institutions which had, until then, carried out welfare tasks. As a result, the government became involved in an increasing number of areas and took on more and more responsibilities. Take poor relief and education as but two examples of many.

In the nineteenth century, the Dutch politician, statesman and historian, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), was a fierce opponent of the centralising tendency of government: in his view there were well-defined fields where the government should not intervene. He exposed the growing power of the State which wanted to expand its influence over society, as an expression of disbelief, because the State was basing its authority on such abstract theories as a social contract and popular sovereignty, with autonomous man as the central figure. The State was not willing, **on principle, to be confined by God's** ordinances.

As an **institution ordained by God, the State was bound by God's justice.** Consequently, the State had to guarantee the historical freedoms and rights of various institutions (**'the Estates'**). And this included the family. Although these institutions owed obedience to the State as far as the outside world was concerned, internally they were completely autonomous, but to Groen this did not imply that they must be left

entirely to their own devices. A certain degree of supervision or elementary principles of justice were still necessary.⁹⁷

Sovereignty in own sphere

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the Dutch politician, statesman, **journalist and theologian developed Groen's insights still further and** devised a more detailed theoretical system: an important element of which was **the 'sovereignty of one's own sphere'**. **Kuyper wanted to** divide society into a number of spheres, for example the family, the church, associations and so on. Authority within these spheres was **derived directly from God's ordinance (and certainly not from the** authority of the State). It was the duty of the State to define and guard the rights of these spheres. Its calling was to provide help and support where necessary and to intervene when matters went fundamentally wrong, but only with the intention of allowing the spheres to flourish independently. It will come as no surprise to hear that Kuyper was totally opposed to the Compulsory Education Act which introduced compulsory schooling for seven to twelve-year-olds in 1900. He saw it as an unacceptable violation of the personal responsibility of parents.⁹⁸

The SGP particularly appreciates the recognition which the doctrine of sovereignty in own sphere gives to the biblical diversity of permanent relationships but it advises caution in applying this theory too narrowly; it could result in certain government tasks which have been ordained in the Bible not being understood correctly and in a possible misunderstanding of the responsibilities of the relationships to each other and to the general good.⁹⁹

Conclusion on the task of the government

A provisional conclusion is that the SGP believes that government activities must, in principle, be restricted to the public domain, and that the responsibilities of social relationships must be left untouched. The government must leave as many social responsibilities as possible to

⁹⁷ A.C. de Ruiter, *De grenzen van de overheidstaak in de Antirevolutionaire staatsleer* [The boundaries of the government's task in the Antirevolutionary constitutional doctrine], Kampen 1961, 13-20.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 21-60. Herman Dooyeweerd later formulated a justification for compulsory education based on the neocalvinist constitutional doctrine, De Ruiter, *De grenzen*, 112.

⁹⁹ Massink et al., *Dienstbaar tot gerechtigheid*, 84-87.

private initiative. Generally speaking, social relationships are certainly more capable of fulfilling social tasks than a large government which is often much more distant from its citizens. The government is in danger of overplaying its role if it sets itself up as a guardian of its citizens capable of solving all their problems.

Government intervention is, however, necessary when the responsibilities within the social relationships are grossly neglected, and justice and the legal order are seriously at risk, and certainly so when this has serious consequences for public life. The SGP, therefore, advocates leaving as much as possible to private initiative but wants the government to create the right preconditions so that private initiative can develop in the right direction.¹⁰⁰ It is important that a hands-off approach by the government does not mean that weaker members of society are left to fend for themselves.¹⁰¹

As a final remark, we must bear in mind that no one - certainly not the government - is capable of excising the fallibility of human existence. **We cannot instruct the government to 'make' the ideal society because society is not 'makeable' nor are children, so it is unrealistic to suppose that welfare services can solve every problem of every child.** It would be good for the government to be aware that not everything is within its capabilities. The instruments available to the government cannot always guide matters in the right direction because some of the requirements for a good society must come from the people themselves, from their inner capacities.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 81-90.

¹⁰¹ The views of other confessional political parties in the Netherlands, the CDA and the ChristianUnion display many similarities with the SGP on the role of the government. They attach a great deal of importance to social relationships and argue in favour of a clear demarcation of government responsibilities. The ChristianUnion, in particular, wishes to adhere to the norms for justice set out in the Bible. See the Research Department of the CDA, *Publieke gerechtigheid. Een christen-democratische visie op de rol van de overheid in de samenleving* [Public justice. A Christian Democratic view on the role of the government in society], The Hague 1990; P. Dijkstra et al., *Een zelfstandige overheid in een sterke samenleving* [An independent government in a strong society], Barneveld 1991; A. Rouvoet, *Reformatoische staatsvisie. De RPF en het ambt van de overheid* [Reformational view of the State. The RPF and the office of the government], Nunspeet 1992. For a clear comparison of the basic principles of these parties, see J.A. Schippers, "'Laissez-faire' of 'laissez-fleurir'?" ["Laissez-faire" or "laissez-fleurir"?], *Zicht*, 1993-4, 153-160.

Instruments

The government has a wide range of instruments at its disposal to achieve its policy objectives. Some instruments are coercive while others act more as an incentive. The memorandum which we discussed above mentions four instruments which are available to the government.¹⁰² It would be sensible to adopt this division and we will mention them in **sequence from 'less generally intrusive' to 'more generally intrusive':**

- providing information to encourage a certain behaviour;
- offering financial incentives;
- making and authorising laws and regulations;
- **undertaking certain activities on one's own account.**

This division will be used later on in the next section and again in the following chapter.

4.3 The task of the government in relation to the family

The preceding section dealt with the SGP's view of the family on the one hand and the government, on the other: in this section we want to bring the two strands together and work out how far the government may go in introducing measures which affect the family as an institution and which guide family life in a certain direction.

First of all, in its principles for family policy, the SGP wants to be guided by what the Bible says about the family and a good family life. As an initial remark, we wish to state that the family is an exceptionally valuable institution and government policy must, therefore, focus on its protection. The SGP thinks that the government must establish a certain basic framework so that the family resembles what God the Creator intended and, with this as a basis, the SGP thinks it is important that each family is made up of a marriage between one man and one woman. The protective task of the government means that it sees the family as a social unit and does not take the interests of individual family members as the starting point for its policies and legislation. An important quality of the family is that its members can offer each other **long-lasting and mutual help and care and that it offers the children a 'cosy nest' to grow up in where they are given an awareness of norms and**

¹⁰² Ibid. 110-111. The report of the Research Department of the CDA, *Publieke gerechtigheid*, 149-175, **gives a more detailed 'typology of government activities'** but it would be going too far to adopt this to categorise the instruments in this short study.

values which they can take with them for the rest of their life. The **government's protection of the family** also implies that the government will facilitate and value the breadwinner aspect of family life, because it is beneficial for a family with children if one parent does not go out to work but stays at home to look after the children.¹⁰³

As we have already mentioned, the SGP wants to leave plenty of scope for private initiative, for private institutions and for the recognition of the specific character of social relationships, the family being the most obvious of these. It will be clear that these ideas require the government to adopt a reserved attitude, especially when family policy is concerned.

We must not forget that the government operates differently from the family. The government generally works with abstract and universally applicable systems (laws and regulations), which make it difficult to tailor activities to a specific sector, but this is an important requirement when intervention in smaller relationships like the family is concerned.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the government works with the notion of **'justice' as its guiding principle for the organisation of society, but in the family it is not so much the concept of 'justice' but more of 'love',** which must be the major factor.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ See also a publication of the RPF (a forerunner of the Christian Union): Douwe Steensma, **'Huwelijk, gezin en overheid. Een theologisch-ethisch perspectief'** [Marriage, family and government. A theological and ethical perspective], and Jan Westert, **'Naar een combinatie van arbeid en zorg'** [Towards a combination of work and care], in: Steensma, Verhage-Van Kooten and Westert et al., *Individualisering en gezinsbeleid* [Individualisation and family policy], 53-56, 114-154. For more arguments on the sceptical attitude of the SGP towards day care, see Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 92-97, which includes descriptions of scientific studies which point out the harmful effects of day care on children.

¹⁰⁴ See also Frans Vosman, **'Jeugdzorg zonder stopregels. Een politiek-ethische vraag bij invasief jeugdbeleid'** [Childcare without stopping rules. A political and ethical question for invasive youth policy], in: De Kruijf and Schaafsma (ed.), *Meer dan een optelsom*, 161-180.

¹⁰⁵ Kinneging, *Geografie van goed en kwaad*, 161-178. That the distinction between the two terms is a biblical one can be seen in the inclusion of justice as predominant rule in the civil laws given by God to Israel ('eye for eye, tooth for tooth'), while Christ takes love as the central concept in daily life, implying for instance 'but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also'.

If the government adopts a reserved attitude towards its family policy, this will often mean that it opts for instruments which interfere in the family sphere as little as possible. It will be clear that the SGP sees marriage as the foundation for the family and that the character of this institution is of such a clearly public nature that it would be appropriate to establish this principle in legislation. It also thinks that the proactive role of the government in solemnising marriages is correct. Any legislation, for example, in relation to divorce or homosexual marriages, must be in line with the principles set out in the Bible.

When it is a question of the SGP's wish to see the family as a social unit which fulfils important functions in society, the party wants to argue especially in favour of a policy which will create the right preconditions and is child-friendly. For instance, it could be a policy which would make it easier for parents or one of the parents to stay at home and bring up the children, instead of strongly discouraging this. In the eyes of the SGP, the government can emphasise its appreciation of the family by providing support. Leave schemes could also encourage parents to spend more time on care for their children, without, however, increasing employment participation by mothers. The SGP also thinks that the government should provide sufficient child-centred financial support to underline its encouragement of parents who want to raise their children themselves.¹⁰⁶

Where parenting support and young people's welfare is concerned, our advice would be for the government to provide the right preconditions so that as much as possible is left to private initiative, whilst the government still provides guarantees of the necessary welfare provisions where problems arise. Effective measures must be imposed in certain circumstances, for example where there are parenting difficulties, which could have important negative consequences for the family situation and therefore for society, as well. Government intervention in the family sphere is justifiable to prevent or to deal with domestic violence and child abuse, or the threat of these, or if there is evident child neglect to such an extent that the legal order is violated.

¹⁰⁶ Hooglander, *Goedgezinde politiek*, 85-101. See also: Steensma, 'Huwelijk, gezin en overheid', 56-62.

4.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has made it clear that the SGP stands for a family policy which is based on the norms and values of the Bible; this means that the government is called on to protect the family as a social unit and - within its competences - to adopt measures for a family structure which respect biblical norms and values.

The SGP also argues in favour of the government adopting a reserved approach and a clear delineation of its tasks and responsibilities where families are concerned. It is very important that plenty of scope is given to private initiative and that recognition is given to the specific character of institutions like the family. The government must be aware of the limits on its capacities while still guaranteeing adequate welfare provisions to solve problems in the family. Where the legal order is seriously violated within a family, because child abuse is taking place, for example, the government certainly has a task to maintain order and rectify matters.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

This concluding chapter will draw the three strands of the previous chapters together. The first section will examine the three models described in the third chapter against a background of the principles and perceptions of the SGP as formulated in the fourth chapter. In the discussion of policy which follows in Section 5.2, we will consider which of the models comes closest to the current situation of family policy in the Netherlands and we will use the prior analysis and comparison, **which we made with the SGP's views on family policy, as a basis for** drawing a number of conclusions; these will then be presented as a number of policy recommendations in Section 5.3.

5.1 The three models

The corporatist model

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the SGP is in favour of a government policy which gives priority to institutions and social networks. The corporatist model fits in with this concept as it directs special attention to the value of family relationships. The family is seen as the foundation of society, with its capacity as a social unit and as an institution with its own character, being well worthy of protection. This model also conforms very closely to the image of man, an image in which man is not seen as a separate individual, but as a person whose position is determined in relation to other people, like the family, the neighbourhood, the civil and church community and other social relationships. The appeal to the personal responsibility of every man to his fellow human beings, society and God can be given a place in this context, so that every human being can develop to his full potential as a member of the human race. In addition, the corporatist model most closely follows the starting point set out in Article 16c of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: **'The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State'**.

The SGP approves of the extensive, child-centred and financial family support which is extended in corporatist countries, not only of the family-friendly and child-friendly universal schemes but also of the specific provisions. These universal schemes emphasise the value of families which function well and help parents with the expense involved in children, because society benefits from well-functioning families and from citizens who have been brought up to be aware of their duties to society. Specific schemes can help combat poverty in families. However, it must be noted that the SGP rejects the pro-birth intentions underpinning family policy in Germany (and France). The question of whether to have children or not is not a matter for government involvement, a point of view which will be substantiated further in Section 5.2. The SGP also values schemes which encourage the breadwinner model of families, such as those in Germany, in particular. It is, of course, regrettable that the German government has started to provide large-scale financial support for childcare in recent years; this undermines the idea that it is best to bring children up in families as far as possible and it would be a good idea if the government provided more assistance for this.

An additional positive feature offered by the corporatist model is the welfare services it provides to protect family relationships and it is a good sign that private institutions also play an important part here. The SGP also welcomes the parenting support which seeks to protect the family; it is also in favour of the policy which creates many of the preconditions for good parenting, because it allows great latitude for particular initiatives. One qualification here is that the government must avoid too great an interference in family situations, and must be particularly careful when its protection of the child seeks to promote child welfare in the broadest sense, as in the corporatist model.

The liberal model

There is appreciation for the reserved attitude of the government in the liberal model, although it may be too reserved in the questions discussed below. The SGP is rather sceptical about the dominant role which is allotted to the free market in the liberal model. The market makes selections based efficiency, but not everything in society can be measured against this standard, and certainly not the value of family relationships. As discussed in the previous chapter, the government clearly has a role to play in the protection of the family. One positive aspect of marital legislation in the United States is that it tends to be

more conservative than that of other western countries; this is favourable to family relationships. However, we need to qualify this by pointing out that this is not a feature of the liberal model in general, but relates more specifically to the current situation in most American states.

The liberal model views the family as a valuable institution; yet the government provides less protection for the family than the corporatist model. A liberal government could give more financial family support. There is unfortunately no room for universal support in the liberal model, something which the SGP is in favour of. It is also regrettable that the United States gives greater priority to the desire to have as few households as possible dependent on government support than to the idea that mothers, including single mothers, should be given the greatest opportunity to look after their, sometimes very young, children instead of going out to work.

Welfare policy in the liberal model - as applied in the US - meets with approval from the SGP on the whole. It is good that the policy centres on the protection of the family as a social unit. As private institutions have taken over the management of many tasks, the government can perform a more passive role in this field, which could possibly prevent it from ideologically influencing parents or families. The SGP also appreciates the way in which governments in the liberal model define their own role relatively narrowly by primarily pursuing policies which are targeted at preventing and dealing with child abuse and reserves this term for situations in which children suffer actual physical or psychological harm.

The social democratic model

It will come as no surprise that - in the light of the previous discussion - the SGP rejects the underlying principles of the social democratic model, because they express too much faith in the capacity of the government to guide families. Its focus is also placed far too much on the individual development of people and ways of promoting this; it has too little consideration for man as a human being in a web of relationships, with his own responsibilities. This means that government policy pays too little attention to the family as a social unit. The SGP supports its more than adequate focus on child-centred family support but the main effect of many of the employment-centred support

packages is to weaken the independence of the family and to undermine the strength of family life.

In social democratic welfare policy, the utmost importance is given to the individual development of the child and not to the protection of the family as a social unit. The welfare schemes are generally universal, which means that every family is confronted with some form of **interference from the government. Therefore, the government's role is** too great and penetrates too deeply into the sphere of the family. Families, as a consequence, have too little freedom to manoeuvre, and substantial harm is inflicted on the specific nature of family relationships. Welfare policy should not aim to improve the welfare of all children across a broad spectrum (and certainly should not seek to guarantee their individual opportunities for development) because families, rather than the State, are generally much better at protecting their own interests. However, there is certainly a role for the government when problems develop and it is clear that the children could be harmed because then the legal order is being violated.

5.2 The Netherlands

In this section, policy in the Netherlands will be compared to that of the countries exemplifying the three models and examined against the basic principles of the SGP. Although the nature of Dutch policy is predominantly corporatist, this section will illustrate that it is increasingly displaying features of the social democratic model. As the above discussion has shown, the SGP finds this an unfortunate development.

Starting points

Dutch policy falls somewhere within the margins of the corporatist model outlined in Section 3.1; neither the state nor the market are dominant in society. It must be concluded, however, that the roles of institutions like the family, as already stated in the first chapter, are decreasing in importance; the SGP is very concerned about this development and proposes that more attention be directed to strengthening institutions like these, since this would improve the quality and resilience of society.

One particularly noticeable characteristic of the social democratic model is the guarantee it gives to individual development as one of the basic

principles underlying the provision of family support measures. The SGP regards this as unfavourable to families; this will be explained in greater detail below.

In welfare policy in the Netherlands, there is a clear leaning towards the social democratic model. This is evidenced by the increasing emphasis on welfare and the creation of opportunities for the individual child in Dutch policy, whereas a corporatist policy would give much more consideration to the importance of the family as social unit. This development is a cause of concern because it is demonstrative of an individualistic orientation in which too little consideration is given to the value of the family as a social unit and foundation for society. As we stated in the previous chapter, the SGP attaches an intrinsic value to the family, therefore this value is not primarily based on the promotion, or degree of promotion, of opportunities for children. This implies that **the Cabinet's focus is too much on the individual child and too little on the family as a social unit.** The special stress on the interests of the child sometimes appears to suggest that the interests of parents and children should be played off against each other, which could in no way be termed a 'family-friendly' move.

It is laudable that divorce legislation has been tightened in order to give families better protection than in the past. The Cabinet should continue along this course and impose stricter conditions on married couples who want to divorce so that there is better protection for marriages and also for the children, who are only too often the victims in divorce cases. When it comes down to protecting marriage and the family and giving these institutions the respect they deserve, it would be a good idea to adopt the same arrangement as Germany has, where financial and tax concessions which were originally intended for married couples have now been made available to married couples only and not to less enduring forms of cohabitation, such as couples who are living together or in registered partnerships. The SGP finds it very regrettable that same-sex couples are now being allowed to marry legally. It is very much opposed to the ideological concept which claims that these **'marriages' are completely equal to that of a man and a woman.** The ideological nature of Dutch legislation is clearly visible in the law which also allows same-sex couples the right to adopt children. In practice, the effect of this legislation actually seems to be hampering possibilities for international adoption for all couples as some countries express their

aversion to potential adoptive parents from the Netherlands because of this measure which is regarded worldwide as an exception.¹⁰⁷

Family policy in general

An important characteristic of the corporatist model, which can be seen in Dutch policy, is the combination of universal and specific (anti-poverty) schemes for financial support for families. The SGP is supportive of this measure because the party sees universal, family-friendly and child-friendly support, and specific anti-poverty support, as the correct choice to make. It must be noted here that child-centred family support in the Netherlands seems particularly parsimonious when compared to other European countries; it should be increased and brought more in line with the European averages.

Policy on family support in the Netherlands is showing marked social democratic tendencies because its focus appears to be increasingly on employment-centred family support. The breadwinner model is being discouraged by tax schemes intended to increase opportunities for women in the employment market (it is almost impossible for poorer families to follow the breadwinner model).¹⁰⁸ A comprehensive system of parental leave and generous allowances for childcare serve the same objective. It all adds up to unjustifiable government intervention in family life. As we have already said in the second chapter, the SGP finds this a very regrettable development and argues in favour of parents being given a real option of choosing to have one parent responsible for caring for the children; this would benefit both family relationships and the development of the children. The Dutch government should certainly not try to emulate Sweden in this regard, but should follow the example of Germany instead where a supplementary allowance is available for the parent who does not go out to work or who only works a few hours. The argument that working mothers are needed as an antidote to an ageing population does not hold water. Experience has shown that significantly fewer children are born in families where both parents are working; so implementing a policy on employment participation will, in the long term, prove counterproductive in combating the problem of ageing.

¹⁰⁷ For a further elaboration of the SGP's views on legislation concerning marriage, see Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 75-81.

¹⁰⁸ Parents who are not able to work part-time or full-time because of a (chronically) sick or disabled child or children are also at a disadvantage.

Praise is also given to the Dutch Cabinet's campaign for young adults which provides information about the medical risks involved in postponing parenthood. The SGP sees children as a gift from God and would not, therefore, support any proposals for political programmes which influence the choice of whether to have children or not; these **programmes reveal the government's far-reaching** interference in family life. But providing information clearly cannot be described as interference. The SGP proposes that the government should remove as many of the fiscal and social obstacles to having children as possible, the first being the one-sided policy on employment participation which in practice shows the government actually creating obstacles. If this policy were to be abandoned, one important obstacle would be removed to mothers having children at an earlier age and to having children in general. Very often the fact that both parents are working full-time or part-time is an important reason for postponing parenthood. As studies have shown, this very often results in fewer children being born.¹⁰⁹ The policy on employment participation, in fact, interferes too much with the natural age for women to have children, an age which is most suitable for the parent and the child (from a medical point of view).¹¹⁰

Welfare policy

The welfare policy of the Dutch government has been following the same pattern of development as already outlined when we discussed employment-centred family support. It may be described as primarily corporatist but there are definite traces of emerging social democratic features. The underlying, fairly individualistic principle has already been criticised at the beginning of this section. It has also been argued in the **second chapter that the government's welfare policy in recent years has** led to increasingly deeper and broader interference in families.

Although the intention of the Cabinet to be more effective in its efforts to tackle family problems is to be welcomed, the SGP is rather sceptical of this paradigm shift, particularly when one of the consequences could be that government influence affects not only more, but possibly all, families. It would be too ambitious for a government to want to monitor all children to check whether they are growing up safely in a sound

¹⁰⁹ See Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 22-28.

¹¹⁰ For a further elaboration of the SGP's views on child-centred and employment-centred family support, see Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 85-101.

environment with enough opportunity to develop their full potential: it would be a negation of the inherent nature of families and would impinge on the own responsibility that parents themselves have, a responsibility which the majority of parents are perfectly capable of assuming. Serious problems must clearly be tackled but this does not mean that the objective of **government policy must be to promote 'every opportunity for every child'**. Certainly, families must be protected but they must also be protected from a government which believes it can mould society and families into its own desired image. As distinct from more or less universal measures in the domain of welfare policy, the SGP argues in favour of a modified or differentiated application of the liberal model, one in which policies are aimed specifically at identifying and tackling specific problems effectively.

The Cabinet has set itself the target of promoting child welfare across a broad spectrum. Although the government gives special consideration to preventing and tackling domestic violence, child abuse and child neglect, child protection policies go further and include the promotion of welfare in general. A clearer distinction should be made - as the liberal model illustrates - between those cases where the safety of the child is at risk and those where it is not. Domestic violence always requires effective and immediate government intervention, but other less fundamental welfare questions require a more restrained approach on the part of the government, which should be more involved in creating the necessary preconditions. Naturally, when problems are identified in a family, help must be given at the earliest stage possible to limit the effects. In many cases, this can be seen as a preventive intervention against child abuse and neglect.

Instruments

The Centres for Youth and Family (CJGs) have the support, in principle, of the SGP but it urges that specific care is taken to prevent them from becoming another hurdle for families. The SGP also appreciates the extra help given to parenting support but only to the extent that it creates the necessary preconditions. Measures to promote foster parenthood **also meet with the SGP's approval because it, too, thinks that placement** in a foster family is preferable to placement in a care home, if the child really needs to be taken into care. The SGP has, however, one cautionary note: the government must remain aware of its limited role in tackling problems within the family.

Insofar as the Electronic Child Dossier (EKD) is no more than a digital version of existing paper files, the SGP can agree to its adoption. The dossier is intended to be a universal instrument which will register every child, so that this means that statutory guarantees of privacy are very important. It will also include comprehensive risk-assessments but these should be restricted to those children who are in families with one or more special needs assessments, such as broken homes, families with a low level of education or addiction problems.

The SGP also welcomes the instrument of the At-risk register for juveniles, because it is intended to **tackle young people's problems more effectively**. The exact scope of this project is not yet clear. Probably the most effective system is one which would allow the exchange of information between child and youth care authorities, educational organizations and the police.

As a general comment, the SGP would like to remark that the Cabinet should stand back and refrain from making detailed arrangements itself, but should look first at the effects that policies which create the right preconditions could have. The Netherlands can learn a great deal from the corporatist and the liberal models on the role of private institutions; the Cabinet should be much more aware of the value their approach has to offer. Its attitude to regulating and categorising initiatives taken by private institutions, whether or not on a voluntary basis, should be more restrained because, generally speaking, this tends to obstruct them rather than support them.¹¹¹

5.3 Policy recommendations

This section will list the most important points raised in the previous sections and formulate them as a series of policy recommendations. General recommendations will be made first; these will be followed by other recommendations which are intended specifically for the Dutch government.

¹¹¹ These conclusions on welfare policy are partly an elaboration and an updating of Hooglander et al., *Goedgezinde politiek*, 82-84. See also: W.M.J. de Wildt and G. Leertouwer, 'Het gezinsgelaat van Balkenende IV: Boegbeeld of januskop?' [The family face of Balkenende IV: Pioneer or Janus?], in: *Zicht* 2007 (33), 3, 26-30.

The Research Department of the SGP makes the following general recommendations on the basis of the preceding discussion:

1. First preference should go to the corporatist model; this model can be recommended for all countries and offers greatest protection to family relationships. In contrast, the liberal model leaves too much to the play of the free market. Family relationships are undermined in the social democratic model because the state has the individual development of its citizens as an objective and because its intervention in the sphere of the family can be relatively far-reaching.

2. A balanced combination of universal and specific measures would be the best option for the financial support of families. Emphasis could be placed on specific measures in welfare policy.

3. Although demographic developments could be a cause for concern in western countries, pro-birth policies should not be adopted. On the other hand, family-friendly and child-friendly policies could result in the removal of obstacles to having children - in as far as this is a task of the government. An initial step could be to make it easier for the one-parent-at-home model.

4. It is wrong to conceive of children as being a sort of hobby, which is what some westerners think. Children are a gift; their rearing is a duty which parents bear the responsibility for, partly for the continuation of society. It is important to be aware of the commitments involved in **bringing up children; they might obstruct the development of a parent's own career.** As a result, some reflection must be made on the ultimate **purpose of a person's life, against the background of the potential** conflict which could occur between the aim of maximum individual self-fulfilment and having a harmonious and long-lasting marriage and family.

5. The fifth recommendation is for countries without a family policy. In this situation, it is important that a statutory foundation for a family policy is first provided, one which establishes the importance of the family in legislation, followed by a phased, practical implementation towards a corporatist model. First the worst abuses must be tackled, like child abuse and child neglect. Women must be protected from men who abandon them for no reason, often leaving the women and children without an income to provide for their basic necessities. Good

healthcare and education for children are very important, for the proper functioning of families, too. Specific attention can then be focussed on offering special support for families in poverty or for those with a disabled member. Development aid organisations could probably carry out research in this field.

The Research Department of the SGP makes the following recommendations for Dutch family policy:

1. We repeat: marriage between a man and a woman should form the basis for the family. Stricter restrictions should be attached to divorce, such as compulsory divorce mediation. Homosexual couples should no longer be allowed to adopt children. It is important that any obligation to pay alimony which is imposed on divorced parents is strictly maintained to avoid hardship to single parents.
2. The Cabinet must also end its policy of employment participation, which is to the detriment of breadwinner families and has an adverse effect on demographic development. A divided system for the tax treatment of families should be adopted so that the family income forms the basis for tax assessment and not the individual income of each of the partners. The budget which the government now makes available to parents for childcare should be made available as a child-linked budget for all parents; in this way parents can decide for themselves how they will spend it. A scheme such as the one in Germany where an allowance is offered to parents who stay at home to look after their children also deserves serious consideration.
3. **The SGP welcomes the government's welfare policy of taking decisive action when serious problems occur in families, but regrets the absence of fundamental debate on the scale of government intervention.** The Dutch government should be much more aware of what its responsibilities are and what are not. The scope of instruments like the EKD and the At-risk Register must be restricted as much as possible; the ambitious target of promoting development opportunities for all children must be adjusted to more realistic proportions. The SGP would like to see greater focus on the family as a social unit as an underlying principle of policy, in preference to the emphasis on the development of the potential of the individual child.

4. Finally the Cabinet should be devoting more efforts to shaping a policy which would create more favourable conditions for child welfare and parenting. It must promote private initiatives, reduce red-tape and refrain from categorising all private institutions (including a set of rules and regulations). The role of the church als a factor must also be taken into account. The SGP would like to emphasise that churches – and church-related associations and volunteers - can play an important role in offering a social network and certain kinds of help or support in the parenting of young people.

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