

When a Culture Excludes God: The Agenda 2030 Impact on the South African Church

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Executive Summary

This report examines the profound theological and structural crisis within the South African Christian community, focusing specifically on the Dutch Reformed Church (NG Kerk) and its subsequent influence on other major denominations. Driven by the inclusive mandates of the United Nations' Agenda 2030—specifically Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 (Reduced Inequalities)—and enforced by South African constitutional law, the church has faced intense pressure to abandon traditional biblical orthodoxy regarding human sexuality. This has resulted in high-profile court cases, massive membership hemorrhaging, denominational schisms, and a theological departure that aligns alarmingly with the biblical warnings found in Romans 1:24-32.

1. The Biblical Foundation: Romans 1:24-32

To understand the current crisis within the South African church, one must first look at the biblical framework regarding cultural decay. In his sermon "When a Culture Excludes God," based on Romans 1:24-32, Pastor Gary Hamrick provides a profound analysis of what happens when a society—and by extension, its religious institutions—exchanges the truth of God for a lie [1].

The Three Stages of Divine Relinquishment

Hamrick points out that the phrase "God gave them up" appears three times in this text, marking a downward spiral of cultural and moral depravity:

- 1 **Given up to Uncleaness (v. 24-25):** God allows people to follow the lusts of their hearts, dishonoring their bodies. They exchange God's truth for a lie, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator.
- 2 **Given up to Vile Passions (v. 26-27):** God gives them over to unnatural sexual desires. The text explicitly describes homosexual behavior, noting that men and women abandon natural relations for those contrary to God's design.
- 3 **Given up to a Debased Mind (v. 28-32):** Because society refuses to retain God in its knowledge, God gives them over to an *adokimos* (debased, worthless, or unapproved) mind. This results in a culture celebrating unrighteousness, culminating in verse 32, where people not only practice destructive behaviors but actively approve of and celebrate those who do them.

Hamrick argues that this ancient text reads like a modern newsfeed. When a culture—or a church—tolerates deviation from God's standard, it eventually embraces complete moral inversion. The

tragedy of the South African church is that it has not only tolerated this deviation under secular pressure but has begun to actively celebrate it, fulfilling the warning of a "debased mind."

2. Agenda 2030 and the Secularization of South African Law

The United Nations' Agenda 2030, adopted in 2015, established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 10 explicitly aims to "reduce inequality within and among countries," promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of sexual orientation [2].

In South Africa, the government integrated these goals into its National Development Plan 2030. Combined with the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and the recent Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Act (2023/2024), the state has created a legal framework that criminalizes "hate speech" and enforces strict equality mandates [3].

This secular legal framework directly conflicts with orthodox Christian teaching. Religious institutions are increasingly viewed through the lens of human rights law rather than constitutional religious freedom. The state's push to regulate religion—spearheaded by the CRL Rights Commission and hate speech legislation—has forced churches to choose between biblical fidelity and state compliance.

3. The NG Kerk Crisis: A Church Divided

The Dutch Reformed Church (NG Kerk), historically the largest and most influential Afrikaner denomination in South Africa, became the primary battleground for this ideological war.

The Synod Decisions and Court Battles

The NG Kerk's stance on homosexuality has been characterized by deep theological instability and legal entanglement:

- **2015 General Synod:** Yielding to progressive internal pressure and the broader cultural zeitgeist of equality, the synod voted to allow individual ministers to solemnize same-sex civil unions and removed the celibacy requirement for gay clergy [4].
- **2016 Extraordinary Synod:** Following massive conservative backlash, the church reversed its 2015 decision, reaffirming marriage as strictly between one man and one woman and reinstating the celibacy rule for gay clergy [5].
- **2019 High Court Ruling:** Progressive members, led by Rev. Laurie Gaum, took the church to the secular courts. In March 2019, the Gauteng High Court in Pretoria ruled that the 2016 reversal was unconstitutional, declaring it "unlawful and invalid." The court stated that the church's policy amounted to unfair discrimination and an impairment of dignity, effectively forcing the church to accept same-sex unions [6].

- **2019 General Synod Capitulation:** In October 2019, rather than appealing the secular court's intrusion into church doctrine, the NG Kerk General Synod capitulated. They officially agreed to allow same-sex unions, permitted non-celibate gay clergy, and issued a formal apology to the LGBTQ+ community for past "homophobic discrimination" [7].

The Agony of the Membership

The 2019 capitulation triggered a massive crisis of conscience for orthodox believers within the NG Kerk. For a denomination that once boasted over 1.1 million members, the fallout has been catastrophic [8].

Consequence	Description
Congregational Schism	Entire congregations, refusing to accept the synod's departure from biblical authority, have severed ties with the central denomination.
Membership Exodus	Hundreds of thousands of conservative Afrikaner members have left the NG Kerk, moving to independent churches or more conservative federations like the Afrikaans Protestant Church (APK).
Theological Fracture	The church is now deeply divided between a progressive leadership aligned with secular human rights and a conservative base mourning the loss of biblical truth.

The agony of the membership is palpable. For many, the NG Kerk's decision represents a tragic fulfillment of Romans 1:25—exchanging the truth of God for a cultural lie to appease the secular state and the mandates of Agenda 2030.

4. The Domino Effect: Other South African Denominations

The fall of the NG Kerk's orthodox stance sent shockwaves through the South African Christian landscape, encouraging progressive factions within other mainline denominations to push for similar Agenda 2030-aligned reforms.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)

The MCSA has engaged in a decade-long debate over human sexuality. While historically maintaining a traditional view of marriage, the church has faced immense pressure to change. Following the NG Kerk's 2019 decision, progressive Methodists intensified their campaign. The church has seen the development of suggested liturgies for the blessing of civil unions of LGBTQ+ persons, pushing the denomination toward a critical breaking point and threatening a schism similar to the global United Methodist Church split [9].

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)

The Anglican Church has experienced fierce internal battles. While the ACSA has permitted the ordination of gay clergy, the issue of blessing same-sex unions remains highly contentious. In 2024, the Provincial Synod narrowly rejected a proposal to allow bishops to approve the blessing of same-sex couples, despite heavy lobbying from progressive bishops and human rights organizations like Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) [10]. However, the continuous pressure ensures that the debate is far from over, leaving orthodox Anglicans in a state of perpetual anxiety.

5. Conclusion: When the Church Excludes God

The implementation of Agenda 2030 and the aggressive enforcement of secular equality laws in South Africa have created a profound crisis for the Christian church. By allowing secular courts and human rights frameworks to dictate theology, denominations like the NG Kerk have effectively excluded God's authoritative Word from their governance.

As Gary Hamrick's analysis of Romans 1 warns, when a culture—or a church—abandons God's design for human sexuality, it invites spiritual blindness and a "debased mind." The tragedy of the South African church is not just the legal battles or the massive loss of membership; it is the heartbreaking reality of a religious institution celebrating the very things that separate humanity from the Creator.

For the millions of orthodox believers left in agony, the call remains clear: to stand firm in biblical truth, refusing to buy into the culture's lies, and to lead with both the grace and truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

References

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