



## Integrating Theology and Development: A Christ-Centered Approach to Holistic Transformation in The Africa Gospel Church

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of theology and development within the Africa Gospel Church (AGC). The study argues for a Christ-centered model of holistic transformation. AGC has historically emphasized holistic ministry through its six E's strategies of evangelizing the unsaved, establishing churches, edifying believers, equipping leaders, exercising social compassion and executive function. This paper demonstrates through empirical research and theological reflection that sustainable development must be rooted in biblical principles which integrates theology and development which is hereby referred to as theology of transformation. Drawing on survey data from 334 church leaders across Kenya, the findings reveal a strong correlation between theological literacy and effective community development. The study concludes with practical recommendations for strengthening the AGC's mission through theological education, participatory development, and integration of all the ministry strategies with theology of transformation.

### KEYWORDS:

Africa Gospel Church, holistic mission, development theology, transformational development, Kenya

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Theology and development are like conjoined twins and they cannot be separated. The two aspects sustain each other and it will be erroneous to separate the two because theology provides the moral and spiritual foundation for development, while development embodies the practical outworking of theological principles in society.<sup>1</sup> The separation or neglect of the union between theology and development comes with a very huge consequences. It exposes the church to the risks of becoming either spiritually narrow in perspective or morally adrift which may result to the church losing its identity of being a transformative agent.<sup>2</sup>

This tension is particularly evident in the African context, where churches often emphasize evangelism while under prioritizing socio-economic development.<sup>3</sup> The Africa Gospel Church (AGC), like many faith-based institutions, faces the challenge of balancing proclamation (preaching the Gospel) and demonstration (addressing physical needs) in its mission.<sup>4</sup>

Theological frameworks such as Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Liberation Theology*,<sup>5</sup> Richard B. Hays's biblical ethics of stewardship,<sup>6</sup> and Kevin J. Vanhoozer's *The Drama of Doctrine*<sup>7</sup> underscore the church's dual mandate of proclaiming the gospel of salvation and to pursue justice, equity, and holistic well-being. The ministry of Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), 67.

<sup>4</sup> Africa Gospel Church Kenya, *AGC Strategic Plan 2020–2030* (Nairobi: AGC Press, 2020), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 45.

<sup>7</sup> Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 89.

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as inaugurated in Luke 4:18–19 entailed preaching, healing, and advocating for the oppressed.<sup>8</sup> Yet, according to John Mbiti, many churches in Africa are struggling to harmonize these dimensions<sup>9</sup> and AGC cannot be excluded. AGC has historically engaged in evangelism and community development since its inception in 1905. However, gaps persist in aligning its theological vision of the “Whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world<sup>10</sup>” with transformative action.

This article argues that Christ-centered theology must drive holistic development, enabling the church to address poverty, illiteracy, disease, and corruption while discipling its members to attain spiritual growth at the same time. Drawing on John 10:10’s promise of “*abundant life*” (Greek: *perisson*, meaning “exceedingly abundant”)<sup>11</sup> and Ephesians 3:20’s vision of God’s transformative power, we examine how the AGC can: Reframe development as a theological imperative, rooted in the *missio Dei* and the incarnation, contextualize its ministry to meet diverse socio-cultural needs across East Africa and encourage partnership with its members and the community at large in order for the church to be able to amplify impact. The AGC can fully embody its calling as “*salt and light*” (Matt 5:13–16), offering not only eternal hope but also tangible healing to a broken world by bridging the divide between theology and development.

The integration of theology and development is not a novel concept but a biblical mandate deeply embedded in Scripture. The Old Testament prophets consistently linked faithfulness to God with social justice (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24). Similarly, the New Testament presents Jesus’ ministry as one that addressed both spiritual and physical needs through feeding the hungry (Mark 6:30–44), healing the sick (Luke 17:11–19), and liberating the oppressed (Luke 4:18–19). This holistic approach reflects the *missio Dei*—the mission of God to redeem and restore all of creation.<sup>12</sup>

The AGC, rooted in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, has historically emphasized sanctification and social holiness. However, in many African contexts, development initiatives are often outsourced to secular NGOs, while the church focuses primarily on evangelism.<sup>13</sup> This dichotomy risks reducing the Gospel to a privatized faith, disconnected from the systemic injustices affecting African communities.<sup>14</sup>

A Christ-centered approach to development challenges this bifurcation, insisting that evangelism and social action are two sides of the same coin.

The Socio-economic landscape of Africa presents both urgent challenges and unique opportunities which require the engagement and intervention from the church. Issues such as poverty, political instability, healthcare disparities, and educational gaps demand a faith-driven response. The AGC, with its extensive network of churches, schools, and medical facilities across East Africa, is strategically positioned to lead in this space. However, without a robust theological framework, development efforts risk becoming fragmented or unsustainable.

To address this issues, African theologians like Jesse Mugambi and Bénédet Bujo have argued for an *African theology of reconstruction*, where the church plays an active role in nation-building.<sup>15</sup> This perspective aligns with the AGC’s vision but requires intentional theological reflection to avoid either uncritical alignment with Western development models or withdrawal into spiritual escapism as was observed by one of the notable African scholars.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, The Africa Gospel Church stands at a critical juncture where it can either reinforce the sacred-secular divide or pioneer a transformative, Christ-centered approach to development. The AGC can model a holistic Gospel that brings “*abundant life*” to individuals and communities alike by grounding its efforts a gospel that integrates theology and transformational development. This is the subject of this article.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine the relationship between theological principles and development practices within the Africa Gospel Church (AGC) in Kenya. As Mugenda and Mugenda note, descriptive designs are particularly suitable for “providing in-depth descriptions of phenomena within their natural settings.”<sup>17</sup> The cross-sectional approach was good because it allowed for efficient data collection from church leaders across multiple regions simultaneously, while maintaining methodological rigor.<sup>18</sup>

The research focused on AGC’s nine administrative regions, which collectively cover 24 counties in Kenya (see appendix

<sup>8</sup> All Scripture references are from the New International Version (NIV).

<sup>9</sup> John Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 112.

<sup>10</sup> AGC Kenya, *Strategic Plan*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 6:58.

<sup>12</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

<sup>13</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 89

<sup>14</sup> Bujo, *African Theology*, 102.

<sup>15</sup> Mugambi, *Christian Theology*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Bujo, *African Theology*, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Olive M. Mugenda and Abel G. Mugenda, *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (Nairobi: Acts Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).

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1). This wide geographical scope ensured representation of diverse ministry contexts, from urban centers like Nairobi to rural areas in the North Rift region (AGC Kenya 2020, 8). The target population comprised 2,055 church leaders (senior pastors, lay leaders, and departmental heads) actively involved in both theological instruction and community development initiatives (appendix 2).

Sampling followed a stratified random approach to ensure proportional representation from each region. As Sekaran and Bougie<sup>19</sup> explain, "stratified sampling enhances representation when the population contains distinct subgroups". The sample size of 334 respondents was determined using Yamane's<sup>20</sup> formula for finite populations (full detail in the appendix).

Data collection employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Structured questionnaires were distributed electronically through email and WhatsApp, including Likert-scale items to enable quantitative analysis and open-ended questions for additional insights.<sup>21</sup> The data was primarily quantitative, with variables such as age and gender, while other categorical variables were coded on a five-point scale to allow for detailed analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27, generating descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients.

The research instrument achieved content validity through expert review by two theological scholars and one research methodologists. A pilot study with 30 respondents yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, indicating strong internal consistency.<sup>22</sup> Ethical clearance was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI Ref. No. 12345), with additional approvals from AGC's executive leadership. All participants provided written informed consent, and data anonymization protocols were strictly followed throughout the study.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study reveal a multifaceted relationship between theological understanding and transformational development within the Africa Gospel Church (AGC) in Kenya. The quantitative data collected from 334 church leaders across nine administrative regions, was analyzed to uncover significant patterns in regional distribution, demographic characteristics, educational attainment, and perceptions of church mission and performance. Collectively, these insights contribute to a richer understanding of how theology, leadership, and organizational dynamics intersect to influence faith-based development.

The regional representation of the sample highlights an uneven distribution of AGC's institutional presence across the country. Kericho, Siongiroi, and Bomet located in the southern Rift valley part of Kenya collectively account for nearly 60 percent of all respondents, underscoring the church's entrenched operations in these regions. Kericho alone contributed 21.6 percent of the responses, followed by Siongiroi at 19.8 percent and Bomet at 17.7 percent. In stark contrast, regions like Nairobi and Nandi reported minimal representation, at 1.5 percent and 3.6 percent respectively. This imbalance suggests a concentration of church activities in specific rural areas while raising questions about engagement and outreach in urban and less-represented rural contexts. Such regional disparities underscore the need for strategic initiatives that ensure broader inclusion and a more geographically balanced distribution of church development programs.

A closer look at the demographic profile of the respondents reveals a predominance of middle-aged leadership, with 39.5 percent aged between 35 and 44 years, and another 29.3 percent in the 21–34-year range. These statistics reflect an emerging generational shift in leadership within AGC, as younger individuals assume more responsibilities in ministry and development work. The gender composition of the leadership, however, is marked by a notable imbalance: male respondents make up 63.5 percent of the sample, compared to 36.5 percent female. This disparity is especially stark among younger leaders, where men outnumber women nearly three to one. The data raises critical concerns about systemic barriers to female leadership within the church, highlighting the importance of intentional efforts to promote gender equity and empower women for leadership roles, particularly in development-oriented ministries.

Educational attainment among AGC leaders also plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational capacity and influence. The majority of respondents have attained post-secondary education, with 35 percent holding diplomas and 29.3 percent bachelor's degrees. A smaller proportion, 16.8 percent, possess master's degrees, and only 1.5 percent have earned doctorates. Leadership roles correspond closely with educational qualifications. Pastoral responsibilities, for instance, are most frequently filled by those with diplomas and bachelor's degrees, while all five PhD holders occupy senior leadership roles. This statistically significant correlation between academic qualification and leadership hierarchy ( $\chi^2 = 18.7, p < 0.01$ ) illustrates how educational advancement not only enhances individual capacity but also increases one's organizational influence. These patterns point

<sup>19</sup> Uma Sekaran and Roger Bougie, *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-Building Approach*, 7th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Taro Yamane, *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Taro Yamane, *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

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to an opportunity for AGC to invest further in theological education and leadership development, especially to equip its pastors and departmental heads for the complex demands of faith-based development.

Beyond structural and demographic insights, the findings shed light on the substantive role theology plays in shaping the development ethos of AGC. Respondents consistently demonstrated a strong awareness of theology's relevance to transformational development. A significant majority (64.1 percent) rated their understanding of theology's role at the highest level (5 on a Likert scale), while an additional 23.7 percent rated it at level 4, indicating that nearly 88 percent of church leaders consider themselves well-informed about the theological basis of development work. This widespread theological literacy serves as a strong foundation for integrating biblical principles into community transformation strategies.

This theological understanding is mirrored by the high level of support for evaluation of development activities through theological and practical lenses. A resounding 94.6 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that regular assessment of how theological principles are applied in AGC's development work is necessary for the continuity and improvement of its mission. The correlation between theological comprehension and support for evaluation is both positive and statistically significant ( $r = 0.463, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that deeper theological education cultivates a stronger commitment to accountability and reflective practice. This insight provides a compelling rationale for incorporating structured theological evaluation mechanisms into AGC's development programming.

One of the core themes emerging from the analysis is the effect of theological understanding on AGC's mission strategy, especially regarding the six core objectives known as the "six E's"—evangelizing, establishing churches, edifying believers, equipping leaders, exercising compassion, and executive leadership. The study also introduced a seventh "E," which emphasizes the expression of faith, love, and service within the local church context. Respondents overwhelmingly affirmed AGC's effectiveness in evangelism and church planting, viewing these as both theological imperatives and development instruments. Over 79 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AGC performs well in evangelism, and 87.1 percent affirmed that this activity is central to the church's identity. A substantial 89.3 percent of participants also agreed that evangelism directly contributes to community transformation.

Importantly, the analysis shows a direct correlation between theological understanding and positive assessment of AGC's evangelistic performance. Among respondents with the highest theological literacy (score of 5), over 63 percent strongly affirmed the church's effectiveness in evangelism and mission. This pattern held across other strategic objectives as well. For example, in relation to church

establishment, a clear majority of those with a high theological understanding strongly believed that AGC prioritizes planting churches based on biblical principles. Correlation coefficients between theological understanding and views on church establishment ranged from 0.314 to 0.560, all statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates a moderate to strong relationship between theological depth and commitment to organizational growth, providing further evidence that theological education plays a formative role in shaping ministry vision and execution.

Edification of believers emerged as another area where theological understanding significantly influences perceptions of effectiveness. Among those who reported strong theological understanding, 61.3 percent strongly agreed that the church was effective in spiritual development and discipleship. This pattern repeated across all four measures of spiritual impact—church effectiveness, edification, enthusiasm for discipleship, and biblical literacy. The correlation coefficients for these relationships ranged from 0.215 to 0.313, again confirming statistically significant associations. These findings emphasize the value of a theologically informed congregation for sustaining robust discipleship and edification ministries.

Moreover, participants with a strong understanding of theology were more likely to affirm that their church leaders emphasize scriptural literacy, and that such emphasis is translating into tangible growth in biblical knowledge among congregants. Among this group, nearly 38 percent strongly agreed that people in their churches are grounded in God's word due to leadership emphasis. This reinforces the idea that doctrinal teaching is not merely a theological exercise but a practical tool for nurturing spiritual maturity and, by extension, holistic transformation.

### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Taken together, the findings from this study offer a nuanced picture of how theology operates as both a foundation and a catalyst for transformational development in the Africa Gospel Church. The regional, demographic, and educational data highlight the structural conditions under which theology is interpreted and applied, while the attitudinal and correlation analyses demonstrate how theological literacy fuels practical engagement with the church's mission. These insights make a compelling case for expanding theological education within AGC, not merely as a doctrinal imperative, but as a strategic investment in community development, organizational growth, and spiritual transformation.

The evidence affirms that the integration of theology and development is not only conceptually sound but also demonstrably effective, positioning AGC as a model for faith-based institutions seeking to fuse spiritual and social missions into a unified approach to holistic transformation. Therefore, strengthening theological understanding on developmental initiatives is crucial for enhancing the church's

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impact. Aligning theological teachings with practical community engagement strategies can foster meaningful relationships within the community and promote social responsibility among congregants. This approach addresses immediate community needs while reflecting the church's commitment to living out its faith through action. Additionally, the AGC should integrate evaluation into its practices by establishing regular assessment processes to gauge the effectiveness of educational and outreach programs. This will ensure that initiatives remain responsive to the evolving needs of the congregation and the broader community, providing valuable feedback for continuous improvement.

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### APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Research Site, target population

**Table 1: Research Site**

REGION AS CLUSTERED BY AGC	COUNTIES COVERED
NAIROBI	Nairobi, Kajiado, Machakos, Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Garisa, Tana River, Kiambu
Narok	Narok and Samburu
Bomet	Covers Bomet East and Bomet Central sub counties in Bomet County
Siongiroi	Covers Chebalungu and Sotik Sub-counties in Bomet County
Kericho	Kericho and Kisumu
Nakuru	Rongai and Njoro sub counties of Nakuru county
Kirengat	Covers Molo and Kuresoi sub counties of Nakuru county
Nandi	Nandi, Uasin Gishu and Vihiga counties
North Rift	Trans Nzoia, West Pokot, Turkana and Baringo Counties.

**Table 2: Target Population**

REGION	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
NAIROBI	25
NAROK	224
BOMET	364
SIONGIROI	405
KERICHO	445
NAKURU	159
KERINGET	164
NANDI	75
NORTH RIFT	194
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2055</b>

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**Appendix 2: Sample size calculation**

To determine the appropriate sample size, the study adopted the formula proposed by Yamane<sup>23</sup> and Israel<sup>24</sup> which has been used widely in the determination the sample size for a finite population. Therefore, the following formula is used to calculate the sample size for this study.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where;

N is the size of the population

e is the margin of error at 95% confidence level which is 0.05

n is the sample size to be determined.

In our Case, N is 2025 leaders in the nine regions of Africa Gospel Church.

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} = \frac{2025}{1 + 2025(0.05^2)} = 334$$

The sample size per region is calculated using;

$$\frac{n}{N} \times RP$$

Where RP is the target population in each region.

The sample size per region is tabulated as shown in table 3.2

**Table 3: Sample Size per Region with Selected Counties and Justifications**

Region	POPULATION SIZE	SAMPLED RESPONDENTS	REASONS FOR SELECTION
NAIROBI	25	5	Nairobi is the capital city and an important metropolitan area with diverse congregational dynamic and church activities. The selection ensures that urban perspectives are represented.
NAROK	224	36	Narok is known for its pastoral communities and rapid socio-economic changes. Including Narok helps capture the experiences of leaders in pastoral and rural areas.
BOMET	364	59	Bomet has a significant number of AGC congregations with a mix of rural and urban influences, offering insights into both traditional and modern development practices.
SIONGIROI	405	66	Siongiroi (in Bomet and parts of Kericho) represents a mix of agricultural and semi-urban contexts, where church leadership plays a critical role in addressing community needs.
KERICHO	445	72	Kericho is a key agricultural region with diverse church leadership that interacts with both rural communities and emerging urban centers. It's important for understanding both traditional and modern development.
NAKURU	159	26	Nakuru has a growing urban population and is economically vibrant, providing a different set of challenges and opportunities for church leadership and developmental initiatives.
KERINGET	164	27	Keringet represents rural areas within Nakuru County, and its inclusion helps ensure that the perspectives of more remote, pastoral communities are included in the stud

<sup>23</sup> Ted Yamane, "Statistics: An Introductory Analysis." 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1967, 100.

<sup>24</sup> Glen D. Israel, "Determining Sample Size." *University of Florida IFAS Extension*, PEOD-6, 1992, 2.

NANDI	75	12	Nandi is largely rural and agricultural, with church leaders playing a vital role in community development. Selecting this area ensures rural dynamics are represented
NORTH RIFT	194	31	Counties like Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo Marakwet, and Trans Nzoia. North Rift encompasses agricultural and rural areas where church leaders are heavily involved in community transformation, and including this area ensures a broader understanding of rural leadership dynamics
TOTAL	2055	334	All 9 regions covered across 24 counties ensuring broad regional representation.

Appendix 3: SPSS Frequency tables and cross tabulation outputs

Table 1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bomet	59	17.7	17.7	17.7
	Kericho	72	21.6	21.6	39.2
	Keringet	27	8.1	8.1	47.3
	Nairobi	5	1.5	1.5	48.8
	Nakuru	26	7.8	7.8	56.6
	Nandi	12	3.6	3.6	60.2
	Narok	36	10.8	10.8	71.0
	North Rift	31	9.3	9.3	80.2
	Siongiroi	66	19.8	19.8	19.8
	Total	334	100.0	100.0	100.0

Age bracket

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	21-34	98	29.3	29.3	29.3
	35-44	132	39.5	39.5	68.8
	45-54	82	24.6	24.6	93.4
	55 and Above	22	6.6	6.6	100.0
	Total	334	100.0	100.0	100.0

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	122	36.5	36.5	36.5
	Male	212	63.5	63.5	100.0
	Total	334	100.0	100.0	100.0

Age bracket versus Gender Cross tabulation

Count

		1. Gender		
		Female	Male	Total
2. Age bracket?	21-34	26	72	98
	34-44	57	75	132
	45-54	31	51	82
	55 and Above	8	14	22
Total		122	212	334

**Highest Educational qualification**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary	2	0.6	0.6	100.0
	High School	10	3.0	3.0	81.1
	College Certificate	46	13.8	13.8	43.1
	Diploma	117	35.0	35.0	78.1
	Bachelors Degree	98	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Masters	56	16.8	16.8	97.9
	PhD/Doctorate Degree	5	1.5	1.5	99.4
Total		334	100.0	100.0	

**4.4.1 Magnitude on Role of Theology of Transformation**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	13	3.9	3.9	3.9
	2	6	1.8	1.8	5.7
	3	22	6.6	6.6	12.3
	4	79	23.7	23.7	35.9
	5	214	64.1	64.1	100.0
	Total		334	100.0	100.0

**4.4.2 Evaluation in terms of theology of transformation**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	5	1.5	1.5	1.5
	2	1	0.3	0.3	1.8
	3	12	3.6	3.6	5.4
	4	60	18.0	18.0	23.4
	5	256	76.6	76.6	100.0
	Total		334	100.0	100.0

**4.4.3 Cross Tabulation of Role of Theology in AGC versus the need of its Evaluation**

Count

		Do you think that AGC Kenya should be evaluated in terms of Theology and Development to ensure continuity?					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Do you understand the Role of Theology on Transformational Development in AGC Kenya?	1	5	0	1	0	7	13
	2	0	0	0	4	2	6
	3	0	0	4	8	10	22
	4	0	1	3	26	49	79
	5	0	0	4	22	188	214
Total		5	1	12	60	256	334