

PROGRAMME REVIEW

Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies

Continental Theological Seminary

Brussels - May 2022

PROGRAMME REVIEW MASTER OF THEOLOGY IN EVANGELICAL AND PENTECOSTAL STUDIES -
CONTINENTAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

VLUHR Quality Assurance
Ravensteingalerij 27
1000 Brussels

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Programme review Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies - Continental Theological Seminary – limited procedure

Introduction

In autumn of 2018 a review panel reviewed the Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies of Continental Theological Seminary. The panel's conclusions were published on 8 May 2019 in the report "Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies".

Based on this report the study programme applied for an accreditation from the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). Continental Theological Seminary submitted a request, accompanied with an improvement plan. The master programme received an accreditation with limited validity, until the end of the academic year 2021-2022 (i.e. October 1, 2022).

Limited procedure

Before the expiration of the accreditation date, the study programme must reapply for accreditation. This limited accreditation procedure entails a self-evaluation report by the study programme, a site visit carried out by an independent panel of expert peers, and the publication of the panel's findings in a review report. With the resulting review report, the study programme can apply for accreditation by NVAO. This review is limited to Standard 3: Outcome level achieved.

Composition of the panel

The review panel of the Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies was composed of four members. One of them was also a member of the previous review panel in 2018. The composition of the review panel was ratified on 2 June, 22 June and finally on 14 October 2021 by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board. The NVAO sanctioned the panel composition on 10 November 2021.

The review panel was composed as follows:

- **Wolfgang Vondey**, Professor of Christian Theology and Pentecostal Studies, University of Birmingham, UK; chair of the panel
- **Rob Faesen**, Professor at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium
- **Anne-Marie Kool**, Professor of Missiology, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia
- **Robert Gyakye Coleman**, Master of Evangelical Theology Student at Tyndale Theological Seminary, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Patrick Van den Bosch, head of VLUHR QA, was the project manager and secretary of the panel.

The curricula vitae of the panel members can be found as annex 1.

Task of the review panel

For this review, the programme prepared a self-evaluation report. VLUHR QA received the report on 5 January 2022 and distributed it to the panel members. Hence, the review panel had the opportunity to study the information stated in the self-evaluation report and to prepare the visit accurately.

The panel visited the programme on 2 and 3 March 2022. During the visit, the panel had meetings with the programme management, students and teaching staff. The panel had also the opportunity to consult a representative set of study materials. The discussions were held in a very constructive way. The visit schedule is attached (see Annex 2).

Finally, the panel presented its findings and conclusions regarding the assessed standards in a draft report. This was done in accordance with the "VLUHR Manual for the external quality assurance in Flemish higher education, 2015". The draft was sent to the programme management under embargo for a response. The panel incorporated the reaction of the programme in its final report insofar it agreed with the remarks.

Review report

Introduction

Since 25 November 2005, Continental Theological Seminary (CTS), located in Sint-Pieters-Leeuw, Belgium, has been registered as a higher education institution. The Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies has been accredited since fall 2007. The master is a 90 ECTS programme. For a long time, there have been plans to expand the programme to a 120 ECTS master programme. Before doing so, CTS wants to establish a 180 ECTS bachelor programme.

The governance of Continental Theological Seminary is carried out by the Board of Trustees and the President. The role of the President is to be the principal administrative officer of the institution. CTS has different departments led by separate administrative officers.

The master programme enrolled 28 students in 2021 - 2022. This figure reflects the enrolment of students in 2020-2021 and 2021 - 2022:

School Year	Total Enrollment	Total Active	Active Part I ¹	Active Part II ²	Inactive ³	Did Not Finish ⁴	Graduates	Postponed Thesis Submission ⁵
2020-2021	25	23	17	6	1	1	3	3
2021-2022	28	27	19	8	0	1	5*	3

Review

Generic quality standard 3: outcome level achieved

The review panel evaluates the outcome level achieved for the Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies as satisfactory.

VLUHR QA REVIEW 2019

The panel made the following conclusions⁶:

The CTS programme management has an evaluation policy with clear assessment, testing, and examination processes in place. In most courses, a research paper is the most substantial component. The examination board approves the course materials and examination questions. This is where the assessment methods and their quantity and quality are evaluated and corrected, if needed, in the light of the learning outcomes for each course. After internal approval of examination questions, they are sent to an External Examiner for assessment.

¹ Currently taking MTh courses

² Currently writing thesis

³ Not currently taking courses, but have not withdrawn from the programme

⁴ Students who have withdrawn from the MTh program or run out of time to complete the programme

⁵ Eligible to submit the thesis that year, but chose to postpone to the following year (or later)

⁶ https://www.qualityassurance.vluhr.be/files/VLUHR_Continental-Theological-Seminary_2019.pdf p. 32-35: Standard 3 - Outcome Level Achieved

At the end of each examination period, the teaching staff carries out double marking of a selected number of essay and examination scripts for each course according to the accepted grading criteria. This process of double marking also serves the purpose of detecting plagiarism.

Teachers are required to fill out an evaluation sheet in which they explain the student's overall mark based on specific grading criteria such as structure, understanding, sources and style. Papers are sent back to the students as feedback. Both staff and students feel a clear sense of transparency with these comments as well as the given grades being made fully available to the student. A grading template for the essays and the theses is provided and the students are well informed about the assessment criteria.

The master's thesis is 30 ECTS credits and involves the completion of a 20,000-word thesis. In the thesis students prove their research skills. It is prepared under guidance of a supervisor who is a member of the teaching staff. The thesis should be a scholarly research work that investigates a well-defined question or an issue in historical, theological, exegetical perspective or theoretical body of knowledge and has to be chosen in the area of specialisation. The completed thesis should demonstrate significance beyond the immediate area of research. The writing of the thesis provides the student the opportunity to show that he has developed the skills of independent thought and critical analysis with the ability to select a well-defined topic, to assemble and appropriate relevant scholarly literature, and to deliver of coherent description of the chosen research project.

Following the completion of the thesis, it will be assessed by the evaluation committee, which consists of the supervisor, one internal examiner, and an external examiner. The final thesis grade is attributed at the deliberation by the Examination Board.

The panel commends the design and structure of the master's thesis. It was clear to the panel that some of the master's theses are very good while other master's theses have a rather low but sufficient level of quality. This is reflected in the marks those theses received. The programme management and the teaching staff are aware that the low quality of some master's theses is a problem. They consider the different backgrounds and low level of English proficiency among some students as the causes of this lower performance. The programme is encouraged to explore ways to improve the level of English proficiency as part of full matriculation.

The graduates did not report any systematic follow-up on the graduates, but the teaching staff initiate regular contacts with the graduates due to their relatively small number. All students passed in the last years, except only one student who dropped out after a case of plagiarism was revealed.

The panel concludes that the programme has a valid, reliable, and transparent method of testing and assessing. The grading of the theses by a second readers demonstrates internal control. The improved feedback system allows students to interact with teaching staff with regard to grading and clarification of assessment. The final level, expressed by the master's theses, is sufficient complying with the intended learning outcomes.

[NVAO ADDITIONAL REVIEW 2020⁷](#)

Based on the published report, CTS submitted an accreditation application to NVAO. NVAO decided to conduct an additional review by a panel of 2 experts that scrutinised Master Theses. The panel judged that not all master's theses achieved the intended outcome level. NVAO made the following conclusion:

The additional assessment shows that a clear delineation of the master level for the final projects is not guaranteed. As the theses form an important part of the determination of the final outcome achieved in the master's programme, CTS should take action to ensure the master's level of the graduates. Substandard Master's theses must also be assessed accordingly. In order to increase the chances of success of the final project, the recommendation of the original assessment panel, endorsed by CTS, to work on the level of English proficiency will not suffice. It is strongly recommended that attention also be paid to the problems pointed out by the experts.

⁷ [NVAO additional Review 2020](#) (p. 47-48: Verslag aanvullende beoordeling gerealiseerd eindniveau van de opleiding Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies - Continental Theological Seminary (CTS) - 8568)

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The panel evaluated the outcome level achieved and **focused in particular on the quality of the master's theses**, given the NVAO report of 2020 expressing critical reservations about a clear delineation of the master's level. The panel dedicated special attention to those areas that raised concerns in the NVAO report: methodology, logical construction and argument, bibliography, relevance for the public domain, as well as proficiency in prevailing theological discourse.

In addition to the panel's focus on the master thesis, the panel paid attention to the follow-up of the **three recommendations from the 2019 peer review report**:

1. Explore ways to improve the level of English proficiency as part of full matriculation;
2. Blind mark the essays
3. Establish a programme for systematic follow-up of alumni.

The panel is pleased to note that CTS has taken significant steps to address these recommendations. However, the panel felt that additional efforts could be made in some areas.

After completing the site visit, the panel felt particularly **impressed by the administrative and personal care for the students** and the deep engagement of faculty in students' academic success and personal welfare. Students and alumni speak highly of the CTS master programme and the opportunities it affords to its students. The panel relates these positive aspects to the personal commitments of staff and faculty, the relatively observable number of students, and the close-knit community.

During its meetings with the various stakeholders of the programme, the panel was able to determine that the recommendations of the 2019 VLUHR QA report and the accreditation with limited duration have prompted CTS and, in particular, the master programme to take some **clearly defined improvement measures** within a short period of time in order to eliminate doubts about the outcome level achieved.

For example, the **testing and examination methods** were reconsidered by the programme management. Oral exams have been added as a response to the previous panel's suggestion to diversify the assessment options, respecting the intended learning outcomes. The panel learned from the programme management and teaching staff that trainings have been provided for those staff members who are not familiar with oral exams. The panel learned that oral exams were especially helpful during Covid lockdowns, when in-person meetings were prohibited. In that case the oral exams were conducted via videoconferencing and, consequently, were also recorded. Besides recording, other transparency measures include having a second member of the teaching staff present during the oral exam. Teaching staff and alumni informed the panel that in the light of students' predominantly ecclesiastical employment, being evaluated orally provides an opportunity for the student to develop the skills of argumentation and persuasion necessary for such work.

The panel learned that students whose first language is not English can benefit from tailored assistance to **improve the level of English proficiency**. CTS has established an English language online writing center (CTS Online Writing Center). When the teaching staff ascertain specific weaknesses in a student's use of theological English, they can refer the student to a particular section of the writing center. An adjunct professor was scheduled to offer an English course in person, but this was not possible due to the pandemic travel restrictions. In the future, CTS plans to make such a course available to students, whether online or on site. The panel supports CTS to start organising this course from next academic year on. Specifically with regard to the master thesis (see below), the panel advises to appoint a specific proofreader for English proficiency. This proofreader must be a different person from the first reader or supervisor.

Regarding the previous panel's recommendation of a **blind marking process**, the panel learned that the programme has implemented blind marking to further ensure unbiased assessment practises. Teaching staff and students are familiar with this and find it a confidence-building practice that guarantees the objectivity of the assessment, should any doubts arise. The panel recommend that this process is clearly documented to allow for verification of how marking is facilitated and protected.

Alumni and representatives of the professional field indicate that CTS has a unique place in the European landscape of theological education and has a special vocation to serve a wide constituency of students who go

into professional careers, Christian ministry, academia, and administrative work. The alumni testified that the master programme is well received not only for its theological emphasis but for its spiritual formation. Concerning the **development of an alumni network** and tracking graduate employability, the self-assessment report emphasizes the international character of research and staff, ecumenical dialogue, and the international makeup of the student body. However, there have also been significant steps taken to integrate alumni into teaching opportunities in the master programme. The programme management invites now also alumni to the CTS campus for conversations with current students about the programme. The panel learned from the students that they clearly appreciate these measures. Currently the programme management has no intentions to establish a programme for systematic follow-up of alumni. However, the panel believes that this recommendation from the 2019 report remains valid. Based on its meetings with the stakeholders of the programme, the panel has no doubt that teachers maintain good contacts with alumni on an individual basis. A structural approach could connect a wider globally dispersed group of CTS alumni. The alumni could be structurally involved in reflections on the fit of learning outcomes in the labour market, fields of employability, and career counseling.

To guarantee the quality of the master's thesis, the programme has made some **changes in its curriculum**. In terms of research preparation for the thesis, there was previously a 5 ECTS course entitled Research Methods and Thesis Writing Seminar. Following the recommendation of the previous panel, this course has been divided and expanded into two separate courses, one of 6 ECTS, the other of 5 ECTS. Since the preparatory work for the master's thesis is now put into the preparatory courses, the master's thesis was reduced from 30 ECTS to 20 ECTS.

The first course is taken at the beginning of the programme and the second is taken closer to the actual writing of the thesis for maximum benefit. The first is **Practical Research Skills and Advanced Research Methods** for 6 ECTS. The course aims to introduce students into various research methodologies and the uses of different research approaches, including mixed methods research. The course aims to equip students to successfully select and apply methodologies appropriate to interdisciplinary research, conduct independent theological research, as well as to present the acquired attitudes, methods, and knowledge; to explain how to set up a theological research project including the essential components; to write and present orally a research question, a methodology, a thesis statement and a bibliography for different research projects.

The second course is the **Thesis Research Portfolio** for 5 ECTS. This new course aims to introduce students to essential skills for pursuing and publishing biblical, theological, and missiological research in the students' own chosen area of studies. It aims to introduce them to various research methodologies and the uses and limitations of different research approaches, including mixed methods research in relation to their own choice of a specific research topic in order to write a master thesis. The course aims to equip students to select and apply methodologies appropriate to interdisciplinary research and writing their own thesis. It has the purpose of guiding the students further to make a specific choice of a topic that fits within the context of a CTS master's thesis. The first part of the module works within a group context whereby the candidates gather and are guided towards the choice and development of their research and are enabled to develop a full proposal based on in-depth research and development of a research question, methodology, thesis statement, and bibliography. In the second part, the module organiser follows up on the research projects on an individual basis so that every student is enabled to write a successful thesis research proposal.

The panel discussed with the students and recent alumni **what is covered in both preparatory courses**. Students indicated that they get acquainted with learning to formulate a central research question, using a methodology in which the teacher helps to look at a source from different points of view, working with logical construction, argumentation and coherence, the use of bibliographic references and the use of relevant literature. In the past, the above-mentioned aspects were formulated as obstacles in the master's thesis supervision. From the meeting with the students and the teaching staff, the panel concludes that the programme has started working on the recommendations of the previous panels without delay. The panel notes that the way in which students come into contact with the above elements shows goodwill and commitment from teaching staff. Nevertheless, it does not bear witness to a systematic research-oriented approach. It is the panel's opinion that the new courses are fit for purpose and tailor-made for this small group of students on an ad hoc basis. However, the didactics of systematically teaching students research-related skills through these courses could be strengthened. This could be done by increasing the scrutiny of methodological assessments in these modules and across the curriculum.

Consideration should be given to staff equipped and trained in the areas of research methods, or perhaps the modules could be team-taught by various staff members from different disciplines.

The panel advocates strengthening the **research capacity in the master's programme**. The panel learned that CTS also wants to offer an official academic bachelor's programme. This Bachelor's programme obviously also needs academically qualified researchers. It may be an opportunity for CTS to invest in attracting more researchers for both programmes, but it would be a threat to the master's programme if the same academic capacity were also to be used for the bachelor's programme.

In preparation for the site visit, the panel read all **master's theses** produced since the previous peer review (5). The assessment forms and written feedback to the master's theses were also studied by the panel members. The panel members each individually and thus as a panel as a whole concluded that each of the master's theses meets the final level that may be expected from a master's student at FQS level 7.

Generally, the panel found that the level of prose, presentation and documentation are satisfactory with good conceptualizing of the issues involved in most cases. The panel acknowledges clear improvement from the quality of theses in previous years. The thesis is now submitted by the student to the supervisor one chapter at a time, which allows for more timely feedback for the student. This also provides more intensive oversight of the thesis on the part of the supervisor. Overall, the theses, although similar, differed somewhat in formatting of spacing, font, headings style, indents, and other details. Referencing was not always consistent, and conversations with students and alumni suggest that there is no exact clarity in the student body on the manual of style recommended for the programme. Such matters should be addressed before the thesis is released.

The panel was satisfied with the **quality of the theses** with regard to methodology, command of literature, and dialogue with the wider ecumenical community, on the one hand, and the assessment of the master's thesis. Nevertheless, the areas of concern that were addressed in the NVAO report of 2020 are not fully solved in the current theses. The panel noted that methodology can be reinforced in some theses. Some have a dedicated section to methodology, while others would benefit from a clearer methodological approach. The panel thinks that each thesis should make clear that students have examined different methodological choices in the existing literature. The panel concludes that CTS succeeds in guaranteeing the minimum level in all cases, but that structurally reaching a higher methodological level depends strongly on students and supervisors. The panel thinks that the structural strengthening of the didactic and research skills of the faculty are crucial in order to reach this higher level.

Students and alumni are clearly satisfied with the **preparation, guidance and supervision** received and hold a relatively high perception of their own achievement. The panel learned from its meeting with teaching staff and programme management that the examiners of the theses felt strongly about the quality of the work assessed. The panel's meetings show indeed often high individual care for students in the supervision process and response to questions and problem in the research and writing. However, the panel did not always share this positive reading of the theses. The panel stresses that it is by no means a question for them whether the minimum level is achieved. It is a question of whether the high marks students sometimes receive for their thesis can be justified in a comparative perspective with similar programmes in other higher education institutions. The panel is of the opinion that the programme could strengthen its external perspective by structurally involving an external - and therefore not CTS-related - examiner in the evaluation of the master's thesis. This may go hand in hand with establishing a grading rubric that details what each marker should assess.

The panel concludes that after the review in 2019 and the NVAO report in 2020, the master programme took action to remedy deficiencies and follow-up recommendations. To this end, the programme management has focused more strongly on changes in the curriculum including strengthening the guidance of students and strengthening the methodological framework. In doing so, the programme succeeded in dispelling doubts about the outcome level achieved. However, the measures taken could be more structurally anchored in the study programme so that it would be possible to challenge students to achieve a higher level than the basic level. To this end, the CTS master's programme should broaden its horizons by bringing in external expertise in both didactic and research areas.

Final judgement of the review panel

As Generic quality standard 3 is evaluated as satisfactory and given the positive judgement of the review 2018 the final judgement of the review panel on the Master of Theology in Evangelical and Pentecostal Studies is satisfactory.

Annex 1: Curriculum vitae

Wolfgang Vondey (PhD Marquette University), originally from Germany, is Professor of Christian Theology and Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, where he also directs the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies. He has taught for twenty years in America, most recently at Regent University, where he founded and directed the Center for Renewal Studies. His research focuses on systematic theological themes through the lens of Pentecostalism, including interests in religion, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and the intersection of theology and the sciences. He is co-editor of the series, Christianity and Renewal-Interdisciplinary Studies, and of Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology. His most recent books include Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel (2017), Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed (2013), 2 volumes of Pentecostalism and Christian Unity (2013 and 2010), and Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda (2010).

Rob Faesen (PhD University of Antwerp) is professor of Church History and of History of Christian Spirituality at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven (Belgium); he is also professor at the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, University of Tilburg (Netherlands) where he is the holder of the Francis Xavier Chair. He is also a member of the Ruusbroec Institute at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). His research focusses on the Middle Dutch mystical literature. He has co-edited Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries (Paulist Press, 2008), A Companion to John of Ruusbroec (Brill, 2014), Mystical Anthropology: Authors from the Low Countries (Routledge, 2017), Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West (Peeters, 2018). He was a member of the editorial team that prepared the critical edition of the works of John of Ruusbroec in the series Corpus Christianorum (Brepols, completed in 2006).

Anne-Marie Kool (Hungary/Croatia/The Netherlands) works as Professor of Missiology and Director of the Osijek Institute for Mission Studies of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia and as Associate Professor of Missiology at the Baptist Theological Academy in Budapest. She holds a PhD (Missiology) from Utrecht University and Dr habil from the Reformed University of Divinity, Debrecen (Hungary). Since 1994 she has been affiliated as Professor of Missiology with several institutions of higher education like the Károli Gáspár Reformed University in Budapest, as Core-member of the PhD Council (2006-2012) and the University of South Africa (2003-2014). She was visiting professor at Protestant Theological Faculty of the Charles University, Prague (2014-2015), visiting Scholar at Princeton Theological Seminary (2007), research fellow at Yale Divinity School (2000) and Senior Scholar in Residence at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven (2000) For her PhD, Anne-Marie has researched an unknown chapter in mission history, the Hungarian protestant foreign mission movement. More recently, she participates in researching the Roma (Gypsy) (Christian) communities in Central and Eastern Europe. She serves as (Vice) President of the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies since 2002.

Robert Gyakye Coleman is currently completing his Master of Evangelical Theology studies at Tyndale Theological Seminary in the Netherlands. He also holds a Master of Arts degree in Ministry from Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana and a Bachelor of Business Economics degree from Brock University in Canada. He is a member of the Methodist Church of Ghana and served as Bible Class leader and a lay preacher in the church prior to his studies at Tyndale Theological Seminary. He is currently writing his thesis which examines how the ancient African churches of Nubia and Ethiopia contextualised the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ and draws lessons for the contemporary efforts at contextualising Christianity in postcolonial Ghana.

Annex 2: Visit Schedule

start	end	2 March
15:30	17:00	internal consultation
17:00	17:45	programme management
17:45	18:00	internal consultation
18:00	18:45	alumni + professional field
19:00		diner

start	end	3 March
9:15	9:30	internal consultation
9:30	10:15	students
10:15	10:30	internal consultation
10:30	11:15	teaching and supporting staff
11:15	12:15	open consultation
12:15	12:45	lunch + internal consultation
12:45	13:30	programme management
13:30	14:00	final internal consultation
14:00		oral report