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Honouring Francois Viljoen: An introduction to the Festschrift

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It has been a great privilege to introduce this special issue of *In Luce Verbi*, dedicated to my esteemed colleague and close friend, Francois Viljoen.

Born on 08 December 1960 in Krugersdorp, Francois Petrus Viljoen grew up in a Christian home. He matriculated from Hoërskool Monument in 1978 and went on to study at the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE), where he earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, an Master of Arts (MA) degree in Greek, and a Doctor of Theology (ThD). During his student years, he served on the university's student council and participated in a mission project.

Following his studies, he completed two years of military service in the Air Force, stationed near Mafikeng. From 1988 to 1990, he served as a missionary at the Reformed Church Gobabis, before being called as minister to the Reformed Church Oudtshoorn (1990–1994) and later the Reformed Church George (1994–1998). From 1998 until his retirement in 2025, he taught New Testament at the North-West University (NWU) and the Theological School Potchefstroom. During these years, he also held several leadership positions, including two years as Acting Dean, and he completed a PhD at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Academia has always been his passion. He has published widely in scholarly journals and books, contributed to church magazines and compiled sermon collections. He has supervised many Master's and Doctoral students to the successful completion of their studies. Alongside his academic work, Francois continues to preach part-time, lead Bible studies, and offer courses.

Francois is the loving husband of Anja Viljoen, a music teacher. Together they have four gifted children: Germarié (professor in law), Rineke (lecturer in music), Anne-Mart (medical doctor) and Wilbert (engineer), who is married to Ingrid-Louise (a primary school teacher).

Francois also enjoys music and plays the trumpet. He is also an artist, and their home is adorned with many of his oil paintings. Beyond his artistic pursuits, he delights in good company and is a connoisseur of food and wine. He likes the outdoors, whether gardening, hiking, cycling, or jogging.

In anticipation of his retirement at the end of 2025, I invited national and international New Testament scholars, as well as former students and classmates of Francois, to contribute to this Festschrift. The response was remarkable: despite the many demands of academic and ministerial life, sixteen authors – each sharing a special bond with Francois – submitted contributions to this Issue.

The focus of his Festschrift is the Sermon on the Mount, a theme that has been central to Francois' lifelong research. Eleven of the fifteen contributions engage directly with Matthew 5–7. Their focus and arguments can be summarised as follows:

- *Matthew 5:10–12*: Klinker-De Klerck (2026) contributes to our understanding of the macarisms in Matthew 5:3–12, in particular the topic of persecution in Matthew 5:10–12 (in comparison to Mt 10:1–42). She supports Hanson's translation of μακάριος as 'how honourable' and confirms Francois' statement that the macarisms function as a practical theodicy.
- *Matthew 5:13*: The co-authors Labahn and Labahn (2026) investigate how the Gospel of Matthew uses the metaphor of salt in Matthew 5:13 and indicate how the phrase 'you are the salt of the earth' provides both identity-forming and ethical guidance to its readers.

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the collection titled 'Francois P. Viljoen Festschrift', under the expert guidance of guest editor Prof. Albert Johannes Coetsee.

- *Matthew 5:13–16*: Similar to Labahn and Labahn (2026), Wilson (2026) focuses on Jesus's statement that his disciples are the salt and light of the earth. Wilson offers a 'missional reading' of the passage and argues that the passage teaches that followers of Jesus are not called to 'change the world' but rather to be embodied witnesses to the transforming presence of the kingdom in their lives and in the common life of the community of disciples.
- *Matthew 5:48*: In my (Coetsee 2026) contribution to Francois' Festschrift, I investigate the apparent unattainable ideal of Matthew 5:48 that the addressees should 'be perfect […] as your heavenly Father is perfect'. My argument is that a better understanding of the most likely Old Testament backgrounds of Matthew 5:48, namely Leviticus 19:2 and Deuteronomy 18:13, leads to a more nuanced interpretation of the two occurrences of 'perfect' in the verse. I conclude that 'perfect' in Matthew 5:48a should be interpreted as 'wholehearted obedience' to God, and not moral perfection per se.
- *Matthew 6:6–13*: Van der Merwe (2026) focuses on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:6–13 and explores how lived experiences of God are fostered by reading or praying this prayer. He indicates that the Lord's Prayer provides the principal spiritual regulation to direct Christians towards their spiritual development.
- *Matthew 6:33*: Vorster (2026) explores the meaning of Jesus's teaching in Matthew 6:33 ('strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness') from a systematic-theological perspective to gauge its implications for Christian moral agency in South Africa today.
- *Matthew 7:1*: Kayumba (2026) indicates how Matthew 7:1 ('judge not, that you be not judged') is frequently misused to promote absolute tolerance and moral relativism, and posits that the passage warns against hypocritical and self-righteous judgement, which indirectly calls the addressees to righteous and humble discernment.
- *Matthew 7:1–5*: Nel (2026) also investigates Matthew 7:1–5, but through a comprehensive rhetorical, parabolic, and conceptual frame analysis, and finds that the ethical vision of the passage emphasises self-reflection, community cohesion, and transformative relationships within the Matthean community.
- *Matthew 7:21*: Van den Os (2026) examines the formulation of Matthew 7:21 ('Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven') for its contribution to Matthew's election theology. He argues that Matthew 7:21 and Matthean election theology must be understood within the matrix of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic perspectives on election, and that Matthew's concept of election is Christological, complex, consonant with the Old Testament, and ethically active.
- *Matthew 5–7*: Cornelius (2026) investigates the identity of the righteous in the Sermon on the Mount, specifically whether 'righteous' is a spiritual or religious identity, a personal or group identity, or a status.
- *Matthew 5–7*: Van Rooy (2026) explores possible connections between the Sermon on the Mount and the Wisdom of Jesus Sirach, comparing their texts across Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions. Particular attention is given to parallels on forgiveness, temptation, evil, and treasures, highlighting how variations in translation and textual history may illuminate Matthew's use of Sirach.

Three articles are devoted to other investigations of the Gospel of Matthew:

- *Matthew 11:29–30*: Mulder (2026) challenges the traditional interpretation of the yoke of the Torah in Matthew 11:29–30 as an oppressive burden. He indicates that within Jewish tradition, it is regarded as a source of joy, and that there is much more continuity with the Old Testament and Jewish usage of the yoke metaphor than is suggested in the traditional exegesis.
- *Matthew 24:27, 37, 39*: Van Rhyn (2026) investigates the purpose of the unique and deliberate characterisation of the return of Christ as ἡ παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου [the parousia of the Son of man] found exclusively in Matthew 24.
- *Matthew in general*: Branch (2026) investigates special descriptions of people, places and ideas in the Gospel of Matthew and how they serve the rhetorical aim of the author.

One other article is also included in this volume. Breed (2026) focuses on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament – another research interest of Francois – by investigating the function of the prepositional clause κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρὸς [according to the foreknowledge of God the Father] as a reference to Exodus 19:3–8 within the argument of 1 Peter.

I hope that these articles serve a twofold purpose: firstly, to express the deep appreciation and affection held for Francois by colleagues and friends; and secondly, to advance our understanding of the Sermon on the Mount, the Gospel of Matthew, and the New Testament.

We extend to Francois our warmest wishes for this new chapter in his ministry and pray that he will continue to embody the very macarisms he has studied and cherished so deeply (Mt 5:3–12).

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