Does Jesus Hide the Father?
An Exegesis of Matthew 11:25 – 30
Mako Nagasawa, June 2009

> [11:25] At that time Jesus said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. [26] Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. [27] All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. [28] Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

Dear ***,

Wow! It was quite stimulating to think of the language of Matthew 11:25 – 27 as supporting a more Reformed definition of predestination, and Jesus' call to rest in 11:28 – 30 as being the expression of 'irresistible grace' to the elect which, in their case, overcame humanity's sinful resistance to God.

I was enriched by the wisdom Christology discussion in your paper on Matthew. The scholars seem to have been quite busy with that question, and I enjoy seeing you engage it. The connection between the Immanuel title and wisdom incarnate was striking and compelling. So too the implication that to reject wisdom incarnate in Jesus is the height of human folly. I think I can trace the interaction between the wisdom Christology and the question of how does one acquire the knowledge of Father and Son in Matthew 11:25 – 27, as you address it. I'm probably understating the case, but are you arguing that if we place Jesus in the category of God's wisdom incarnate, granting knowledge of God, then we must also ask if this knowledge of God is naturally attainable or even desired by sinful humanity? And if the answer is no, and knowledge of God is not naturally attainable or desired by sinful human beings, then Jesus must be exercising 'irresistible grace' in providing us with it?

The first question I have about your essay is that I don't think it's that easy to slide between the disciplines of biblical studies/exegesis and systematic theology. Of course, the two are related fields. But to reach a conclusion about the meaning of predestination, about which systematic theology has a rather large stake and much analysis of its own, from a treatment of a relatively small section of Matthew is quite ambitious, and in my opinion, a bit hasty. The second question I have is whether your exegetical decisions took into account enough data. Can I present you with some considerations? I'll write more from the standpoint of biblical studies and exegesis than from systematic theology, which I'll save for the end.

Wisdom and Temple Motifs
I was puzzled to find a lack of comment on the 'new Temple' motif Jesus continued to develop in 12:1 – 21 and further on in Matthew's Gospel. This is a question I have for the commentators you cited as much as for you, since they make very large claims about Matthew's overall presentation of Jesus along this line. Essentially, I wonder if they are overstating the case. For example, the word 'wisdom' appears only three times in Matthew: 11:19, 12:42, and 13:54. The first reference concerns wisdom as the prophetic Scriptures, vindicating the claims of John the Baptist and Jesus. The second refers to the wisdom of Solomon, and Jesus refers to himself as a greater and wiser king than Solomon. The third refers to Jesus' knowledge of Scripture in the view of other Jews in Nazareth who are impressed by Jesus' learning. While the concept of wisdom might be present in ways beyond the syntactic usage of the particular word 'wisdom,' (e.g. Jesus refers to his disciples as 'wise' in 7:24 and 23:34, though he also calls his opponents 'wise' in 11:25) in this case, the point might be significant.

It seems to me that on a historical level in first century Israel, Jews were much more aware of and sensitive about the Temple. Jesus was not crucified because he claimed to be 'the new wisdom.' Rather, one of the major reasons for his death was his claim, effectively, to be 'the new Temple,' offering God's forgiveness and presence, the point that was quite shocking to most Jewish leaders. For example, as soon as Jesus offered the paralytic 'forgiveness of sin,' a declaration only possible previously at the Temple, the Pharisees reacted with suspicion and anger (Mt.9:1 – 7). In my opinion, this makes it all the more likely that Matthew would develop themes of Davidic kingship and Temple, because to persuade Jews of the identity of Jesus, he would have had to be quite compelling on that question.

I don't wish to overstate my own case either. I recognize a literary and historical relation between the two motifs – wisdom and Temple – especially in the sense that the Davidic Messiah was meant to receive wisdom (meditate on the Law) and build the Temple. This relation is Adamic in its root: Adam received God's wisdom (command) and lived in the Edenic paradise where heaven and earth once intersected (Eden as Temple), so the Davidic kings were to be a type or figuration of Adam; the Messianic king was to be a new Adam. Of course we understand Jesus to have united those and many other motifs in himself in a deeper way than what was historically expected, so to speak of one motif at the sheer expense of the other is not appropriate.

New Temple Christology in Matthew 12:1 – 21

Nevertheless, I believe the new Temple theme helps to better explain Jesus' speech and course of action throughout Matthew's Gospel, and especially in 11:25 – 30. In the slightly larger context of Matthew 11:25 – 12:21 in particular, it helps us understand Jesus' actions and speech. In the first of two Sabbath controversies which follow the 'restful yoke' passage, the Pharisees argue with Jesus about his disciples picking grain on the Sabbath. In response to their complaint of 'Sabbath', Jesus responds with the counterargument of 'Temple.' Jesus' main point, acknowledged by Old Testament example and pattern, seems to be that in the presence of God, certain rules change. David and his men were in the 'house of God' (i.e. Tabernacle – Temple) and could therefore eat the bread. Similarly, the priests also work in the Temple on the Sabbath without breaking the Law. On some level, the Old Testament recognizes that being in the presence of God in the Temple meant that a new relation to the Sinaitic Law was possible.

A comparison to Mark and Luke reinforces the point. Significantly, Matthew includes Jesus' comment, 'But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here' (Mt.12:6). This phrase does not appear in the parallel Synoptic accounts in Mark 2:23 – 28 or Luke 6:1 – 5, which emphasize Jesus' Davidic identity as the sufficient basis for his ability to allow his disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath. Nor does Jesus' remark about the priests in the Temple on the Sabbath appear in Mark or Luke. These are significant literary moves Matthew is making, deepening the argument and providing more grist for the mill of Jewish controversy about the identity of Jesus. This emphasis on the Temple is uniquely Matthew's. Matthew, much like John, presents Jesus as the new Temple, the new presence of God and point of disclosure about the knowledge of God. (The second Sabbath controversy, involving the healing of the man with a withered hand, is probably meant to illustrate the healing of humanity, or the creation of a new humanity, that happens in the presence of God in Jesus.)

Jesus' Quotations of the Old Testament in Mt.11:28 – 30[1]

Hence what you call a conflated quotation from Exodus 33:14, Jeremiah 6:16, and Jeremiah 31:25 may serve a different purpose than the one you suggest. The larger theme that is already traced through the Old Testament is the offer of rest (from enemies, exile, hardship) because of God's presence, a theme that began from the creation in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. I trace that theme through at least eight major biblical texts.

Passage	*God's Dwelling Place*	*Motif of Rest*
Genesis 1:1 – 2:3	Creation as Temple	God gives rest in the garden land
Exodus 33:14	Tabernacle	God offers Israel rest in the garden land
Isaiah 28:12ff.	New Temple	Israel refused rest, God re-offers
Isaiah 30	Jerusalem Temple to be destroyed	Israel refused rest (sought alliance with Egypt), God re-offers
Isaiah 66:1 – 2	Humanity as New Temple	God seeks rest among/in humble humanity
Jeremiah 6:16	Jerusalem Temple to be destroyed	Israel refused rest, God will destroy Jerusalem Temple
Jeremiah 31:25 – 34	New Temple	God will build make a new Temple in humanity

In the Genesis literature, the entire creation was seen as a type of Temple in which God's presence dwelt, and human beings were in a state of 'rest.' Rikki Watts argues that Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is modeled after other Ancient Near Eastern stories where a conquering god or king built a palace-temple.[2] Human beings were to be the priests in

[1] Unfortunately, Matthew 11:28 – 30 is not discussed by Gregory Beale and D.A. Carson, editors of the excellent work *Commentary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI: 2007).

[2] Rikki Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1", *Stimulus*, Volume 12, No.4, November 2004

this original creation-Temple. This type of 'rest' was later experienced in the Tabernacle or its more durable form, the Temple.

For instance, Exodus 33:14 also contains this idea: 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' Jesus was probably calling to mind the specific mode of God's dwelling with Israel in the Tabernacle. Echoes of the idea of the promised inheritance and victory over enemies were also bound up in this quotation, but in Matthew, Jesus will continue to clarify those echoes and reshape Israel's thinking on that: He will trigger thoughts of Isaiah 42, that is, Gentiles coming to the God of Israel ('knowing the Father' from Mt.11:25 – 27?) in Matthew 12:17 – 21. Then, he will supremely reshape the idea of walking into a promised inheritance and having victory over enemies through his death, resurrection, and great commission to announce to 'the nations' (*ethnoi*) his authority and teaching. This is both similar and dissimilar to how Mosaic Israel claimed the 'promised inheritance' of the garden land.

I would add another Old Testament source that you do not consider: Isaiah, who also deals with themes of rest and Temple. Isaiah's use of the word 'rest' and his engagement with the Temple as a physical institution and a literary theme in Israel's Scriptures are very significant. Three major passages explicitly mention the word 'rest' with respect to Israel. The first is Isaiah 14, a vision where God reverses the Babylonian captivity, where Israel instead takes Gentiles 'captive' and receives from God 'rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved' (14:3). In fact, after the king of Babylon falls, 'the whole earth is at rest and is quiet' (14:7). The second is Isaiah 28, an oft-quoted passage by the New Testament writers: the rebuke of Israel's leaders for teaching a lie, refusing the offer spoken in many tongues, 'Here is rest, give rest to the weary,' (28:12) and God's response of laying the foundation stone of a new Temple which becomes a stumbling block. The third is Isaiah 30, God's rebuke of Israel for relying on diplomatic ties with Egypt, the coming destruction in spite of the call to repentance and rest (30:15), and therefore the healing of Israel on the other side of exile. Quite interesting is the promise of the Lord appearing to Israel as a Teacher on the other side of the exile: '[30:8] Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him. [19] O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. [20] Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. [21]Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left.'

A fourth major passage refers to the rest for which God Himself looks:

[66:1] Thus says the LORD,
'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.
Where then is a house you could build for Me?
And where is a place that I may *rest*?
[2] For My hand made all these things,
Thus all these things came into being,' declares the LORD.
'But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Here again, the motif of rest and that of Temple intersect, but in a surprising way. Isaiah is, at the very least, relativizing the physical Temple ('a house you could build') in Jerusalem. God is anticipating dwelling with (within?) those who are humble and contrite of spirit. This language is almost certainly synonymous with the 'poor in spirit' of Jesus' beatitude (Mt.5:3), which itself anticipates both Jewish and Gentile responders. And it corroborates the meaning of Immanuel, which of course is also from Isaiah and quoted by Matthew.

Thus, I think you are not correct in asserting that we are meant to hear the phrase 'we will not walk in it' in Jer.6:16 and then 'we will not listen' in Jer.6:17 in the background of Jesus' invitation to accept his 'rest.' Such an echo would serve to support a Calvinist position, of course, making the Jewish leaders appear so bent on rejecting God that Jesus' invitation to them could only trigger a vehement 'no.' But the exegetical question here is: Out of all the quotations in this thematic thread appearing through the Old Testament, why is only this particular one important? In my opinion, you are taking an additional and unjustified step in saying that Jesus appropriates Jeremiah 6 as the governing or controlling text out of these three or four OT sources; or, going further, that he uses Jeremiah 6 as the governing or controlling interpretation for the larger question of what predestination means and whose will it

involves. I believe that Jesus is quoting from a chain of Scriptures that are conceptually linked together by a thematic development.

In support of my point, Jesus is probably also quoting from Jeremiah again, in Jeremiah 31:25 – 34, which, as you point out, is about God regathering His people from exile, renewing His covenant with them in new hearts, and the restoration of the role of the city Jerusalem in some form. Jeremiah's language for the new covenant include 'wisdom' motifs but also 'Temple' motifs. The 'law written in the heart' might be one way of invoking a wisdom motif, but it may also recall the tablets of the Law placed in the ark of the covenant, located in the Temple, in effect already referring to God's people as a new, living Temple. Especially given Jeremiah's interest in the former Temple, it is easy to see in Jeremiah 31 an ongoing concern for 'Zion' (Jer.31:6, 12), 'the abode of righteousness, the holy hill' (31:23), and a new Jerusalem (31:38 – 40) as part of the 'new covenant' (31:31 – 34). How would God return to His people? What would that look like? Jesus is now answering that question. This is very significant to what Jesus was discussing in the immediate context in Matthew.

The Significance of Temple Echoes for Matthew 11:25 – 30

While I think there is a bit more coherence thematically and literarily if we hear the OT echoes this way, I also believe it corroborates the step I'm making here: These OT passages are not discussing 'wisdom.' Instead, they are discussing 'Temple.' Also significant is the fact that the material in Matthew 12:1 – 21, which immediately follows the 'restful yoke' passage, concerns the Temple and Jesus as the new Temple. Hence, I think it is fair to interpret Jesus as engaging with Temple motifs; Matthew encourages us to see him as the new Temple of God. In other words, through him, God makes His presence known and reveals His true nature. This allows us to see how the Son reveals the Father in 11:25 – 27 in a category that is not the same as the wisdom Christology in which the scholars you've consulted have placed it.

This is a Temple Christology, in which the presence of God is physically 'hidden' (11:25) in a 'house,' that is, the physical body of Jesus, but is nevertheless made known through Jesus' word, his verbal self-disclosure. In other words, people might look at Jesus and evaluate him by his physical appearance, which is nothing special, and conclude that he is simply human. This happened repeatedly in Jesus' ministry. Or they may assess his intellect and speaking ability, which is unusual but still possible to ignore. This mistake, and the previous one as well, happened when Jesus went to his hometown (Mt.13:54 – 56). Or they may look at his miracles by themselves, which are certainly impressive, but Jewish prophets did miracles, too, without being the very presence of God or claiming to be more than a prophet. The Pharisees even suggest that Beelzebul is the power behind Jesus' miracles (Mt.12:24), and then, outrageously, ask for another sign (Mt.12:38). It was very easy for people to reach a wrong conclusion, but Jesus does not simply give up on them or console himself with the apparent certainty that the Father's inscrutable will was being worked out in people's rejection. This is why Jesus regularly emphasized the importance of listening to his verbal description of himself over his miracles, and sometimes refused to do miracles (Mt.12:38ff.).

So I understand Jesus in Matthew 11:28 – 30 differently than you. He is not, in my analysis, irresistibly calling his predetermined elect by verbal fiat, but laying down the conditions by which the Father can be known in and through the Son: His listeners had to recognize that they were 'weary and heavy-laden,' which probably also means 'poor in spirit' (Mt.5:3) and a few other Matthean and Isaianic descriptors. They had to come to Jesus for the rest God promised by His presence. Then they would come to know the Father in the life, words, and actions of Jesus the Son. The knowledge of the Father in and through the Son can be apprehended by a human being who is willing to encounter Jesus by hearing his words and coming with faith, perhaps having considered the Scriptures about the Messiah (Mt.11:1 – 19) or Jesus' miracles as well (Mt.11:20 – 24), but certainly not without Jesus' own words. For such a person, a whole new reality opens up: An insight into the very nature of the Triune God whose name is 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' (Mt.28:20).

If we read Mt.11:25 – 27 through the lens of a wisdom Christology, then we might, though perhaps not necessarily so, interpret the hidden/revealed dynamic wholly in the category of divine initiative, as you have. It might mean that God is hidden to some and revealed to others, in a way that is mutually exclusive. It might be a permanent principle of God's operation of the universe, and has to do with Jesus bestowing divine favor on a subset of humanity. It therefore extends beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus into the ministry of the church.

However, if we read the same passage through the lens of a Temple Christology, then the hidden/revealed dynamic lies in the category of our epistemology, specifically sight versus hearing.[3] Which sense are people using in approaching Jesus? And with what heart posture? The hidden/revealed dynamic certainly has to do with the character of the Father being hidden in the flesh of Jesus but revealed in and through the words and actions of Jesus as the Son, with widespread verbal proclamation of that fact. Thus, God is simultaneously hidden and revealed in Christ, towards all. For example, though he doesn't use the word 'Temple', Jesus insists publicly that he functions as the new Temple, 'That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' (Mt.9:6). A startling remark in any case, but the more so if we hang it in this framework of Temple Christology.

This affects how we understand what is hidden and what is revealed. The question is not whether Jesus is withholding vital information from some people while sharing it with others. That type of wisdom Christology would place us in the Gnostic pattern of forming secret societies as in the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Gospel of Judas*, where only certain people get secret information. You are clearly not saying that. Nor is it, in my opinion, how Jesus effectually calls some but not others, although if one chooses to believe that that is what is happening *behind* the text, I suppose one is entitled to that opinion. However, on the *surface* of the text, in my opinion, Jesus is proclaiming the same information about himself to all, and *how* a person listens determines whether that person can properly understand the content of what Jesus is saying.

Matthew 11:25 – 30 in the Context of Matthew's Gospel

All this fits very well with what follows in Matthew's Gospel: Jesus calls more and more attention to his own word. After healing a demon-possessed man (12:22), some Jews express amazement and questions (12:23), but the Pharisees reinterpret the miracle as a Satanic stage act (12:24). Jesus argues against their interpretation (12:25 – 32) and then goes further to warn the Pharisees to re-examine the evil in their hearts in order to not speak evil and blaspheme the Holy Spirit (12:33 – 37). Their ability to hear and accept Jesus' word is affected by what is in their hearts.

Although Jesus speaks in ontological categories (just as the tree bears fruit according to its kind, so the heart speaks words according to its kind), he seems to have in mind the possibility that the heart can be changed, presumably by him. The theme of the evil (or hard) human heart needing transformation is also a major theme in Matthew (e.g. Mt.5 – 7; 15:1 – 28; 18:35; 19:1 – 12), probably connected to Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's understanding of the human heart as wicked and needing a spiritual replacement from God. This need for a new heart is indeed sobering, but it does not automatically mean that human beings are absolutely incapable of recognizing their heart-level evil and need for a new heart (transformation). It is possible, though it is far beyond the scope of what Matthew tells us, to argue that human agency in our salvation depends not so much on us discerning the goodness of God in His reality and fullness (who can do that?), and desiring Him as such, but on us discerning the wickedness in ourselves and desiring transformation from a God we can vaguely understand, who offers us a new, purer, and better heart. The

[3] The fact that Matthew 11:25 – 27 (and Luke 10:20 – 24) uses curiously Johannine language for the same Temple Christology is no accident. In John's Gospel in particular, the same dynamic appears. Jesus is not truly known through sight but through hearing. Although John's imagery of light and sight are very prominent, they are curiously subordinated to hearing in every instance. The Gospel is bookended by two statements about the limitations of seeing: 'No one has seen God, but the only begotten Son has explained Him' (Jn.1:18); and 'Blessed are those who did not see, but still believe' (Jn.20:29). And all throughout, we have episodes of Jesus trying to verbally clarify who he is, while people try to evaluate him using multiple criteria: if we look at his family lineage and plain humanity in isolation, he is simply human (Jn.7 – 8), if we look at his miracles in isolation, he is simply a magician (Jn.6), if we look at his death on the cross, he is an unfortunate innocent bystander of political intrigue (Jn.19). Only those who listen to what he is saying about himself can respond with true belief, for Jesus' true identity as being in the Father, as well as his desire to draw others into the eternal life of the Triune God (Jn.14 – 17), can only be described in words; it cannot be pictured or relayed through symbol. Jesus can make an analogy to it (just as Israel ate manna, people must internalize Jesus, the true bread from heaven), and the *effects* of it can be demonstrated by miracle (healing humanity), but the purpose of God to disclose Himself in and through Jesus to draw people into Himself can only be verbally described. The same is true of God's nature. The surprising conclusion that the Gospel of John makes, however, is that it is possible to know Jesus, and the Triune God revealed in him, just as well as the first disciples did, because having other sensory data about Jesus (touching him, smelling him, seeing him in simple physical form, or even seeing him do miracles) did not give you any vital information; all that data was secondary and non-vital. All the vital information one needs comes by hearing, just as it did in the earthly ministry of Jesus. This was probably one reason why John wrote his Gospel – to assure second generation Christians who never knew Jesus in the flesh that it was never conclusive, nor even important, to know Jesus in the flesh. Hence, even though sometimes it leads to confusion and misunderstanding, Jesus constantly speaks words that invite people to him. One might even say that he struggles with people's own deficiencies to help them understand what he says.

Eastern Orthodox tradition holds this view. Here is a representative voice: 'God becomes powerless before human freedom; He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence. Certainly man was created by the will of God alone; but he cannot be deified [made Holy] by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will to raise up the image, but two to make the image into a likeness. The love of God for man is so great that it cannot constrain; for there is no love without respect. Divine will always will submit itself to gropings, to detours, even to revolts of human will to bring it to a free consent.' (Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*) Both Catholic and Protestant branches of systematic theology follow Augustine in his monergism (only one will – God's) and have struggled ever since to make sense of human sin, unbelief, and evil without making God the author of it. The Eastern Orthodox tradition rejects Augustine's monergism and articulates conclusions of systematic theology very differently. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The Pharisees ask for another sign, which is remarkable given their own commitment to explain away Jesus' miracles as something else (12:38). In response, Jesus insists that they listen to his word and not evaluate his miracles independently, putting them into their own framework. While he makes a cryptic prediction about his resurrection, he gives Jonah and Solomon as reference points: They did no miracles; they only spoke. Jonah did no miracles; he only preached (12:39 – 41). Solomon did no miracles; he only spoke wisdom (12:42). Jesus again declares the significance of listening to his words. By simultaneously warning the man healed of demon-possession, about the danger of being cleansed of a demon without taking additional spiritual steps to be inhabited by Jesus' Spirit, Jesus says by analogy that their resistance, if not renounced now, will stiffen and increase (12:43 – 45).

When his mother and brothers arrive, Jesus takes the occasion to state that he is forming a new family around those who (implicitly '*hear*' and) do the will of the Father (12:46 – 50). To answer the question of how one becomes part of this family, Jesus delivers the first of the kingdom parables – the parable of the soils – to explain to his disciples the form that the kingdom of God is taking (Matthew 13:1 – 23). Both divine and human agencies are highlighted in this parable. The parable of the soils is, in fact, a word about the word: It is an explanation by Jesus of how his word reveals the hearts of human beings. He speaks, they respond. On the one hand, since the parable is a rhetorical strategy and rhetorical device, Jesus is calling people's attention to the state of their own hearts when they hear his word, and he is prompting them to pursue him further by asking questions about the parable. On the other hand, Jesus' phrase 'to you it [the explanation] has been granted' (13:11) speaks in the passive voice of divine agency, though what this means for defining the nature of predestination is still very much uncertain. It might mean that God alone drew the few disciples Jesus had to him, without a serious consideration of their human decisions to do so. Then again, it might not mean that. It could mean that the disciples were now privy to hearing something explained by Jesus because they had already responded to him, in a limited way, though they still had much to learn.

I favor this latter explanation of the text. We know that their understanding of Jesus was flawed all the way until the resurrection, and certainly at this point in the story. Still to come are the partially disastrous confession of Simon Peter and his denial of the necessity of Jesus' death (Mt.16:16 – 26), and the disciples' confusion about whether the kingdom of God is one patterned after the existing governments of this world, complete with privilege and military power (Mt.20:20 – 28; 21:1 – 16). Wouldn't a serious treatment of Mt.11:25 – 27 and also 13:16 – 17 factor in the slow development of the disciples to fully grasp the mission of Jesus, and hence the heart and plan of the Father? At what point in Matthew did the disciples fully see or understand (or better, apprehend) the Father through Jesus? Only at the resurrection. Does Jesus reveal the Father in this way to everyone? Or was this pattern of development unique to the first Jewish disciples?

Stepping back to ask a larger question relating to an exegesis of Matthew: Does Jesus reveal the Father gradually this way to everyone? Can we divorce the presentation of the disciples' actual learning process from the claim of Jesus to reveal the Father? Is it on Jesus' initiative that people *misunderstand* him like the disciples did? Is Jesus responsible for their misunderstanding, even though he held Simon Peter quite personally accountable for his own misunderstanding (Mt.16:16 – 26), and other people in other ways? Or, as I suspect, was the pure revelation of the Father through Jesus encountering other human foibles of understanding in the disciples, which needed to be reworked as part of their/our human responsibility?

Moreover, does this manner of understanding the text of Matthew 11:25 – 30 explain the plot, activities of the characters, and interactions between them? For this is not a disembodied statement, but a statement located in a narrative. For example, a question to ask about the narrative is: Why does Jesus keep pressing other Jews to listen to his word if he knows who will believe and who won't? What reasons are offered by Matthew as the narrator of a

story? And either way, then what then do we do with the other Gospels, and Acts, which present the learning process of the disciples in slightly different ways? And what about the categorical shift from the 'messianic secret' of Jesus' earthly ministry to the openly kerygmatic, resurrection-proclaiming disciples of Acts? Something changed for the disciples. These questions are rather large unanswered ones that might complicate the decisions we make about the definition of predestination, as we edge our way into the realm of systematic theology.

Stepping back to ask a still larger question relating to an exegesis of multiple New Testament texts: As I mentioned earlier, we might have to consider Paul's insight that Israel in Jesus' day was hardened, in my understanding, temporarily (so that Jesus would be crucified) but now God's mercy is being shown to Jew and Gentile alike (Rom.11:11 – 16, 25 – 32) without any barriers (new hardenings) from God's side. What does that mean? That seems to match Mark in his Gospel progressively showing us that all humanity had hardened hearts: 'their hearts were hardened' is said of the Pharisees (Mk.3:5) and then the disciples too (Mk.6:52), and then all humanity, including Israel under the Sinaitic Law, after the fall of humanity (Mk.10:5). Encountering the resurrected Jesus is a remedy for 'hardness of heart' but it is not clear that this remedy was available *before the resurrection*. Paul's remarks in Romans 11 also corroborate Luke's three observations that prior to the resurrection, the disciples were limited in what they could understand: 'they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask him about this statement' (Lk.9:45), 'the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said' (Lk.18:34), and 'their eyes were prevented from seeing him' (Lk.24:16). Again, this problem may have to do with some aspect of Jesus' identity and work (primarily his death) being somehow impossible to fully grasp *before the resurrection*, which the death and resurrection of Jesus made possible. If Paul's statement in Romans 11 conditions our reading of the Gospels, this might be the case. That might affect the way we interpret Matthew 11:25 – 30 and all of Matthew as well. I can't make that case fully here, but suffice to say at this point, that I believe the field of biblical studies does and must consider relations between texts like this. Again, this may or may not affect one's particular definition of predestination when all is said and done. It might, it might not. But it would certainly make it much less likely that any analysis of Matthew 11:25 – 30 alone could provide the answer to that.

A Glance at Systematic Theology

As I now try to integrate my understanding of Matthew's Gospel with the various traditions of systematic theology which I appreciate, many avenues broaden out for discussion. You asked what is at stake in seeing human beings as 'free,' – which is a complicated concept in itself. The much older, classical attempts to define 'freedom' accounted for one's nature first and foremost. One was 'free' if one was able to make decisions according to one's nature. Thus, God was completely 'free' because He is completely loving and good. The idea that 'freedom' means the ability to choose both good and evil indiscriminately was simply not how the discussion was framed. However, after various shifts in thought caused by science and philosophy, we moved away from this understanding. Aquinas, desiring to engage Islam in the 1200's, merged the God of the Bible with Aristotle's Prime Mover to lay the foundation for an omnicausal God, a 'god' that, among subsequent Christian scholastic scholars, began to resemble the Islamic Allah.[4] Existentialism in the 1900's formally reduced us down to actions (existence) and removed any consideration of nature (essence). Our framework for thinking and talking about 'freedom' – whether it be God's or humanity's – is now quite dangerous. For what we now mean by 'freedom' tends to mean *one's will, irrespective of any discussion about one's nature*. Now, we do consider 'freedom' to mean the ability to choose either good or evil quite indiscriminately. In some cases, because one's 'nature' by definition limits one's choices, people hear consideration about one's 'nature' as a hindrance to one's 'will' and 'freedom.' And then we posit God's freedom and human freedom as opposing, without consideration for our natures.

[4] David Bentley Hart (lecture *Nihilism and Freedom*) notes that the shift continued throughout the late scholastic period, when Christian theology incorporated the idea of voluntarism. Whereas early Christian writers like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa argued that God cannot do evil – since evil is a deficiency of which God is not capable – the scholastic movement increasingly placed an unprecedented emphasis on God's sovereign will as the primary attribute in God, especially God's will as prior to God's nature. In order to properly assert God's omnipotence, it seemed necessary to say that His will was absolute even regards good and evil. Scholastic scholars William of Ockham and Thomas Bradwerdine said that God does not command that which is good; that which is good is good because God commands it. That is, His will is not obedient to His nature as God; and His will does not follow from His divine goodness. I believe Jacques Ellul's analysis (*The Subversion of Christianity*, Eerdmans: 1986, p.95 – 112) of the influence of Islam on Western Christianity is also quite trenchant on other issues; Islamic influence on Christian theology was also substantial, for example, among the Spanish Dominicans like Domingo Banez.

My impression is that, despite many notable contributions in systematic theology, much of the Reformed tradition unfortunately makes this mistake. There is the tendency to articulate God as not inherently related to humanity, or not ontologically (by nature) committed to humanity. For example, I question the tendency of many systematic theology textbooks to first discuss 'God in creation,' and then handle subjects like divine providence, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. and then discuss 'God as Trinity' only at a much later point. It is as if we can treat God as a Singularity when He relates to everyone outside Himself – in some theological systems by His sheer omnicausal power – and only later consider God as Trinity to see how that affects things, or to determine if we can say which Person of the Trinity does what. I find Karl Barth's general approach to systematic theology much more solid, where God must be considered as a Trinity first, because that is who He actually was and is, even before He created anything. To the best that I can tell, the Patristic writers, the Eastern Orthodox tradition, along with Catholics like Hans Urs Von Balthazar and Thomas Weinandy, and Protestants like C.S. Lewis, the Torrance brothers, and sometimes Donald Bloesch, follow this general approach. In this theological method, we can certainly say that God is love, relationality, unity, and so on even before God began to create anything. Before He is even 'holy,' since before creation there is nothing 'common' with which to compare 'holy,' we must say that God is love.

Also, humanity is patterned after the Triune relations within God. Humanity is made in the image of God (Gen.1:28), even though, before and behind that, Jesus is and always has been the true image of God, the firstborn over all creation (Col.1:15) and the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being (Heb.1:3). We might say that humanity was created specifically in the image of 'The Image.' Irenaeus, the earliest theological writer we know of outside of the New Testament authors, recognized this: the pre-incarnate Christ served as a *pattern* or *model* for humanity. That is, as the Son is related to the Father in the Spirit, internally to the Godhead, so humanity is to be related to God by the Spirit, externally to the Godhead but drawn up to participate in God (e.g. Eph.4:24 – where we 'put on the new self, created *in God*') as God reveals Himself in us. There is an internal pattern of relationship within God that God extends beyond Himself in creating humanity. Conceptually, this is already a Temple-like arrangement, where one indwells another, which makes it all the more significant to discern the 'new Temple' thread not only in Matthew but in all of Scripture. Humanity was designed to be a living Temple, a people indwelled by God. Barth took the bold step of saying that there has always been a certain Humanity of God, a divine Humanity that is within God from which He made and patterned humanity. If these things are so, then we must also say that God's commitment to humanity is unbreakable, because it is patterned after the Father's commitment to the Son. This commitment on God's part gives rise to the biblical language of 'covenant relationship.' God was free to create or not create humanity, but once He did, and Adam and Eve fell into sin, He had to do all He could to redeem us. God was not free to discard us, annihilate us, or otherwise do nothing to save us from our sin. In love, He had already bound Himself to us. God's purpose towards humanity, flowing out of His loving Triune nature, is to be *for humanity*, as He intended humanity to fully be, that is, as He revealed it in Jesus. Towards humanity, and even towards fallen humanity, God is love. His love may not always feel to us like love; sometimes it feels like a chastisement, a humbling, or a painful revelation, but it is nevertheless love from God's standpoint.

But in much of Reformed systematic theology, in its long descent from Augustine, God and humanity can (should?) be understood independently of each other, a move that I fundamentally question. For example, D.A. Carson says that God 'owes nothing' to humanity, which is fine in and of itself as a statement; I agree that God is not motivated by some sense of duty from *outside Himself*. But isn't He motivated by a sense of love from *within Himself*? If this is so, then how could one articulate God as freely (arbitrarily) loving some sinners but not others, as D.A. Carson and others maintain? Is there a conflict of attributes in God between holiness and love? Even if we postulate both holiness and love as the two core characteristics of God, we would still be at a loss to explain why God applies His holiness towards some (in hiddenness) and His love towards others (in self-revelation). Wouldn't that mean that God, at the core of His character, is simply arbitrary? There lies an inconsistency. Or, others (like B.B. Warfield or A.A. Hodge) can define God as a Being who could have scrapped the whole creation-humanity project into hell after the fall of humanity, but simply chose not to. This assertion is apparently meant to reinforce the idea that God's mercy is an unexplained choice on God's part, that it was not necessitated by anything at all, even the very character of God, and is therefore all the more merciful. Yet if that hypothetical scenario was indeed possible, then once again love would be purely accidental to God, and God cannot be said to be love, inherently, at the very core of His character. He can love, and does love, and might love, but He would not be love in Himself because at no point does God have to love; God would simply be arbitrary once again. But that would again be quite a puzzle to integrate with the Christian assertion that God is a loving, Triune Being who is love in Himself. So one's

theological method seems to me to almost determine one's results. The central question in systematic theology is whether we discuss God's *nature* prior to God's *will*, or, for all intents and purposes, not at all.

Coming back to your paper, then, perhaps some good questions to discuss would be: What impact, if any, does it make to first consider the nature of the Triune God and the nature of humanity, before you make statements about how they are acting, and as you read Matthew 11:25 – 30? If you read it with the sense that the hidden/revealed dynamic is a mutually exclusive one that sorts people into two categories by divine verbal command, I suppose there might be a way to still understand God 'loving' the very people from whom He hides Himself, while apparently holding them responsible for their lack of perception. Personally, that stretches the meaning of the word 'love' beyond my ability to recognize it, so it is difficult for me to make very much headway on it. But I'm open to discussing other people's attempts at doing so. Or, if you read Matthew 11:25 – 30 with a Temple Christology where the hidden/revealed presence of God is simultaneous, directed towards all humanity, and makes greater room for human choice, and even calls it forth, then what are the pros and cons of that? I think there is a different convergence between exegesis and systematic theology with my interpretation, but I'm happy to entertain further thoughts on it.

But also, the larger questions would include: What does it mean to take sin seriously in a theological sense? I wholly agree with your conviction that we must take sin seriously. I sensed in your approach the Augustinian-Reformed paradigm that in order to take sin seriously, we must eliminate any possibility of humanity choosing God, and therefore make God the sole agent in restoring relationship with humanity. If that is the case, then we find it difficult to explain why God says He wants all to be saved, but does not actually do so. At that point, we must resort to the concept of 'mystery.' We place a 'mystery' either in the character of God or in the mechanics of salvation. Single predestination tries to preserve some sense of asymmetry and mystery with regards to all sin and unbelief, and I can respect that, although I prefer the Eastern Orthodox articulation. Double predestination, however, flatly denies the implications of God being Triune, and I can hear you being careful about stepping there. My question is: Are you aware of other theological ways to be utterly serious about sin, and yet not within these paradigms?

What if we were to place the 'mystery' somewhere else entirely? When it comes to redemption, following the lead of others I mentioned, I prefer to compare the relation between the Father and Son to the relation between God and humanity for the purpose of understanding our 'freedom': Just as it would be hard to use the word 'irresistible' to describe the relationship the Father has with the Son, so by the same token, it would be hard to use the word 'irresistible' to describe the relationship God has with us, even in redemption. Rather, He designed us in our very nature to lean towards Him, to be inclined towards Him, and to be 'free' in our love for Him, for that is our original human nature. Paul spoke of the internal witness of the conscience in all human beings in Romans 2:12 – 16, which is a way of saying that we as human beings universally still carry within ourselves a memory of being made in the image of God, which in turn gives rise to our search for justice, meaning, dignity, value, love, connection, spirituality, beauty, order, etc. Sin in this sense is understood to be an irrational violation of our own nature, a tarnishing and a deconstruction of the self that God created. So perhaps, when we are confronted by Jesus and hear the truth about him, does something in our human nature recognize him? After all, he is who we were meant to be: 'All things are from him, and for him, and to him' (Rom.11:36; Col.1:16). This is how our decision to believe in Christ can genuinely be from God and also our choice simultaneously – this is the human choice that brings glory to God, for in believing in Jesus, we are only doing what God designed us to do.

The rejection of Jesus in particular is the rejection of God's offer of a redeemed, fresh (incorruptible), and elevated (glorified) humanity in Jesus' resurrected humanity. Rejection of Jesus can only be understood as a bottomless irrationality on the part of any human being who chooses to do that. Hence, I don't think that it is for God to explain why people choose to reject Jesus. Nor is that my responsibility; for why would I offer any rational reason for an unbeliever to reject Jesus, especially a reason that finds its root all the way back in God's will? It is only for the unbeliever to offer his or her own feeble, indefensible attempt at a justification of why they are rejecting their truest self, others, and God. The character of God and His commitment to us is clear and without any 'mystery.' The only 'mystery' in the theological system lies at the feet of the unbeliever to answer for: Why in the world are you rejecting Jesus?

Well, we are venturing into a field with many rabbit holes to trip and happily fall into, so perhaps it would be wiser to stop here for now. I hope it's been fun for you to read this paper, as it was for me reading yours. Looking forward to talking more.

Warmly,
Mako