

Dear Fellow Pilgrims of Faith,

As always it was good to see you this morning, to pray with you, and to gather around the Bible to try to understand it for our daily walk of faith.

As I promised, below is the prayer that C. S. Lewis considered a footnote to all prayers; beside it is my attempt to translate his poetic words into today's prose. It is one of my favorite prayers—one that Jews and Muslims might appreciate more than Christians—worth keeping in mind at every confession and profession of faith, cf. Psalm 19 and *Dao De Jing* 1 among other things (see texts: [Dao De Jing \[English, German, etc.\]](#); [Da De Jing \[English versions\]](#); [Da De Jing \[Chinese with English\]](#)—very, very informative; [Dao De Jing with notes](#)—very informative commentary on the translation).

“Footnote to All Prayers”

[C. S. Lewis, 1898-1963, *Poems*]

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow

When I attempt the ineffable Name,
murmuring Thou,
And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in
heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing
Thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers
blaspheme
Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore
dream,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived,
address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts,
unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed unskillfully, beyond desert.
And all men are idolaters, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at
their word.¹
Take not, O Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in
Thy great,
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor
translate.

Kang Na's translation:

O God, when I pray to you, only you know who it is that I am praying to as I try to say the unutterable name every time I address you as “you”—as if I can ever really know you as you are—and when I aspire to see perfect images of you by embracing in my heart impressive and churchy ideas, words, and things that I know in the end cannot possibly be the same as what you actually are. If we take seriously or really mean the words we use in our prayers, then all prayers are blaspheme, and we are actually worshipping with imperfect thoughts and words that do not come close to saying the truth about you, although we think we know you through our words, which are in reality just reflections of our distracted thoughts, as deep and clever as they might seem—all worthless unless you yourself in your mercy direct and guide all the words we use in our attempts to pray to you; for we are all idolaters praying to deaf idols of our own making using our ideas and words, even the most religious ones—that is, if you take our prayers literally. O Lord do not take our prayers literally, by the words and ideas we use. Accept our feeble attempts to know you and pray to you by taking our heart's desire in the place of our inadequate and impotent words, which we ask you to translate into your divine, eternal language.

¹ Original spelling: *idolators*.

Please let me know if you can offer improvements to my attempt to translate C. S. Lewis's profound poem-prayer into clear prose. Thank you for the blessing you are to me as a class. Have a wonder-filled evening.

Faithfully and gratefully yours,

