

A Hymn to God the Father

-JOHN DONNE

This is a three-stanza poem that is divided into sets of six lines, or sestets. From the title, 'A Hymn to God the Father,' it is clear that Donne intended this piece as a hymn. It has a light, musical quality to it which can be found in most of Donne's work. The perception is in part caused by the rhyme scheme.

The lines follow a consistent pattern of ABABAB, without any alteration in end sounds between the stanzas. Line one of all three stanzas rhymes, and so on through all six lines. Additionally, there is a great deal of repetition in the text. This too adds to the feeling that this is a song with verses and, most importantly in regards to repetition, refrains.

In regards to meter, this piece is mostly structured in iambic pentameter. This means that the majority of the lines contain five sets of two beats. The first of these is unstressed and the second stressed. There are some exceptions though, such as in the last two lines of each stanza. These lines contain, respectively, four and then two sets of two beats per line, known as tetrameter and dimeter. This change makes the parting words of the speaker all the more impactful.

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM:

STANZA 1

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

In the first stanza of 'A Hymn to God the Father', the speaker begins by asking God a question. He needs to know whether God is going to be able to "forgive" the sins of the world. These are the things for which all of humanity suffers but which he was not a part of. The speaker makes sure to add that they were "done" before he was born but unfortunately because he's on earth, he's a part of it.

The next lines describe how the speaker is not without sin himself. He might be separate from the larger sins of the world but that doesn't mean he is pure. In fact, he states that over and over he is running "though" sin. His inability to escape his own humanity is reflected in the repetitive lines of verse. The use of the same words at the beginning of lines, such as "Wilt though forgive that sin" in lines one and three is known as [anaphora](#). It is used to unify the text as well as enhance its song-like qualities. The repetition is also reminiscent of the structure of a prayer.

The speaker makes sure that God knows his run through sin is not done because he wants to be a sinner. He "deplore[s]" his own actions but is unable to stop. The last two lines of each stanza are mostly the same. Here, he tells God that

when he finishes helping and forgiving sins there will be "more" to do. His sins, and those of the world, go on indefinitely.