

A HYMNE TO GOD THE FATHER by JOHN DONNE

by

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John Donne, (born sometime between Jan. 24 and June 19, 1572, London, Eng.—died March 31, 1631, London). HE was a leading English poet of the Metaphysical school and dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London (1621–31). Donne is often considered the greatest love poet in the English language. He is also noted for his religious verse and treatises and for his sermons, which rank among the best of the 17th century. John Donne was the chief of the Metaphysicals and others include Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, John Cleveland and Abraham Cowley as well as, to a lesser extent, George Herbert and Richard Crashaw.

Their work is a blend of emotion and intellectual ingenuity, characterized by conceit or “wit”—that is, by the sometimes violent yoking together of apparently unconnected ideas and things so that the reader is startled out of his complacency and forced to think through the argument of the poem. Metaphysical poetry is less concerned with expressing feeling than with analyzing it, with the poet exploring the recesses of his consciousness. ‘A Hymn to God the Father’ by John Donne is a three stanza poem that is divided into sets of six lines, or sestets. From the title 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.

Stanza One

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 this piece the speaker begins by asking God an important 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 on that they were “done” before he was born but unfortunately, because he’s on earth, he’s a part of it. The reference here is to the Original Sin of Adam and Eve.

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 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 him and forgiving his sins there will be “more” to do. His sins, and those of the world and will therefore go on indefinitely.

“When thou hast done, thou hast not done,” is repeated in Stanza one and two and is called a refrain. There is a pun intended on the word **done**, where the first meaning is **Donne the poet and the second meaning is ‘done’ or finished the act of forgiving the poet.**

Stanza Two

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won

Others to sin, and made my sin their door?

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun

A year or two, but wallow’d in, a score?

When thou hast done, thou hast not done,

For I have more.

In the next set of six lines the speaker begins with the same phrase, “Wilt thou forgive that sin...” This time the question ends with the revelation that the speaker has forced others into sin. It is unclear what kind of sin he means but it was made “their door.” He created the opportunity, or the door, for them to walk through. John Donne was born for religious poetry. “A Hymn to God The Father” belongs to “Holy Sonnets” of John Donne, in which he, after careful analysis of his life, asks forgiveness for his sins. John Donne was the only person who wrote religious poetry. Many poets tried to write religious poems, in which they praised God and Christ. Donne is remembered until today because no one can surpass him in writing religious poems. Although he started from love poetry, yet his fame was dependent on “Holy Sonnets”.

Stanza Three

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done;

I fear no more. Donne is not sure about his end. He has doubt regarding his union with the Divine. He has fear in his mind that he will disappear after his death. However, it seems that he has a strong belief in afterlife. The last stanza of the poem has much significance. Donne's journey from love poetry to divine poetry is evident from this stanza. The poet wants to be superior. He wants to go near God. It is, therefore, in the last stanza he has fear in his mind regarding his identity in the eyes of the Almighty. He believes that he has not achieved spiritual powers; the powers, which can bring him closer to God. Thus, he has no other solution except to ask forgiveness. What he wants is mercy and that too at the time of his last breath. If the mercy is awarded to the poet, he "fear[s] no more". The poem ends on a positive note of reassurance and restored belief in the grace of God for the poet.