

# Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (Lord's Supper)

from *Apostolic Constitutions*

a fourth century church order from Antioch<sup>1</sup>

*Some anachronistic,  
but instructive cues  
for modern students*

## Prayer Text

1 The grace of almighty God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be  
2 with you all.

3  
4 **All say together: And with your spirit.**

5 *The bishop:* Up with your mind.

6 **All: We have it with the Lord.**

7 *The bishop:* Let us give thanks to the Lord.

8 **All: It is fitting and right.**

9  
10 *The bishop:* It is truly fitting and right to praise you before all things, essentially existing God,  
11 existing before created things, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named, alone  
12 unbegotten, without beginning, without lord or master, lacking nothing, provider of all good things,  
13 greater than every cause and origin, always being in one and the same mode, from whom all things  
14 came into being as from a starting-point. For you are knowledge, without beginning, eternal vision,  
15 unbegotten hearing, untaught wisdom, first in nature, alone in existence, too great to be numbered.

16  
17 You brought all things from non-existence into existence through

- 18 • your only-begotten Son,
- 19 • the Word, God,
- 20 • living wisdom,
- 21 • the firstborn of all creation,
- 22 • the angel of your great purpose,
- 23 • your high-priest [and notable worshipper],
- 24 • king and lord of all rational and sentient nature,
- 25 • who was before all, through whom are all.

26  
27 For you, eternal God, made all things through him, and through him you vouchsafe a fitting providence  
28 over everything. Through him you granted existence, through him also a good existence; O God and  
29 Father of your only-begotten Son, through him before all things you made [the heavenly powers], the  
30 cherubim and the seraphim, the ages and the hosts, virtues and powers, principalities and thrones,  
31 archangels and angels; and through him after all these things you made this visible world and all that is  
32 in it.

33  
34 For you are he who set out heaven as a vault, and stretched it out as a screen, and established the  
35 earth on nothing by your sole intent; you fixed the firmament, and arranged night and day; you brought  
36 light out of your treasures, and by its contraction you brought on darkness (to give) rest to the living  
37 things that move in the world. You appointed the sun in heaven to begin the day and the moon to begin  
38 the night, and you inscribed the chorus of the stars in heaven to the praise of your magnificence.

39  
40 **You made water for drinking and cleansing, life-giving air for breathing in and out, and for the**  
41 **production of sound through the tongue striking the air, and for hearing which is aided by it to**  
42 **receive the speech which falls upon it.** You made fire for comfort in darkness, for supplying our need,  
43 that we should be warmed and given light by it. You divided the ocean from the land, and made the one  
44 navigable, the other fit to be trodden by our feet; you filled the one with creatures small and great, the  
45 other tame and wild; you wove it a crown of varied plants and herbs, you beautified it with flowers and  
46 enriched it with seeds. You constructed the abyss and set a great covering on it, the piled-up seas of  
47 salt water, and surrounded it with gates of finest sand; now you raise it with winds to the height of the

## DOCTRINE OF GOD

*Note the combination  
of apophatic/  
cataphatic phrases,  
communicable/  
incommunicable  
attributes in this  
section.*

## CHRISTOLOGY

*Compare the range  
of these titles  
with those in  
Louis Berkhof.*

## CREATION & PROVIDENCE

<sup>1</sup>Trans. from *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, ed. R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, 3rd ed. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), W.E. Pitt, "The Anamneses and Institution Narrative in the Liturgy of Apostolic Constitutions Book VIII," in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 9 (1958), 1-7, and Raphael Graves, "The Anaphora of the Eighth Book of the Apostolic Constitutions," in *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 173-194.

*A deft touch here—to give praise for the goodness of snakes before narrating the fall.*

### THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

*For Prof. Cooper's final exam, be ready to evaluate this phrasing.*

### FALL

### SOTERIOLOGY / ATONEMENT

### OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

*Note all the references to LAW / COMMANDMENT*

*For Prof. Van Reken's classes, evaluate the five references to "law" here, especially as it relates to creation and the work of Jesus.*

*This sounds like a very contemporary concern.*

48 mountains, now you level it to a plain; now you drive it to fury with a storm, now you soothe it with a  
49 calm, so that it gives an easy journey to travelers in ships. You girdled the world that was made by  
50 you through Christ with rivers and flooded it with torrents, you watered it with ever-flowing springs and  
51 bound it round with mountains as an unshakable and most safe seat for the earth. For you filled the  
52 world and adorned it with sweet-smelling and healing herbs, with many different living things, strong  
53 and weak, for food and for work, tame and wild, with hissing of reptiles, with the cries of variegated  
54 birds, the cycles of the years, the numbers of months and days, the order of the seasons, the course  
55 of rain-bearing clouds for the production of fruits and the creation of living things, a stable for the winds  
56 that blow at your command, the multitude of plants and herbs.

58 And not only have you fashioned the world, but you have also made man in it, the citizen of the world,  
59 displaying him as the ornament of the world. For you said in your wisdom, "Let us make man in our  
60 image and likeness, and let him rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air." So also you  
61 **made him from an immortal soul and a perishable body, the one from what is not, the other**  
62 **from the four elements. And you gave him in respect of the soul, logical reason, discernment**  
63 **between godliness and ungodliness**, observance of right and wrong, and in respect of the body, the  
64 **five senses and the power of motion**. For you, almighty God, planted by Christ a garden eastward in  
65 Eden with adornment of every kind of plant for food, and in it, as in a costly home, you placed man;  
66 and in making him you gave him an inborn law, that he might have in himself and of himself the seeds  
67 of the knowledge of God. And when you had brought him into the paradise of delight, you allowed him  
68 authority to partake of everything, and forbade him the taste of one thing alone, in the hope of better  
69 things, that, if he kept the commandment, he should receive immortality as a reward for that.

71 But when he neglected the commandment and tasted the forbidden fruit, by the deceit of the serpent  
72 and the counsel of the woman, you justly drove him out of the paradise; but in your goodness you did  
73 not despise him when he was utterly perishing, for he was the work of your hands, but you subjected  
74 creation to him, and granted him to provide food for himself by his own sweat and labors, while you  
75 caused everything to shoot and grow and ripen. And in time, after putting him to sleep for a short while,  
76 **you called him to rebirth by an oath; and after destroying the limit of death, you promised him life after**  
77 **resurrection.**

79 Nor was this all, but you poured out his descendants to a countless multitude; you glorified those who  
80 remained faithful to you, and punished those who rebelled against you; you accepted the sacrifice of  
81 **Abel** as being a righteous man, and rejected the gift of **Cain**, who slew his brother, as being a man  
82 accursed; and in addition you received **Seth** and **Enosh**, and translated **Enoch**.

84 For it is you who fashion human beings and provide life and fill need and give laws and reward those  
85 who keep them and punish those who break them; you brought the great flood upon the earth because  
86 of the multitude of the ungodly, and saved righteous **Noah** from the flood in the ark with eight souls,  
87 the end of those who dwelt there, but the beginning of those who were to be; you kindled the terrible  
88 fire against the five cities of Sodom, and turned a fruitful land into salt for the wickedness of those who  
89 dwelt in it, and snatched holy Lot from the burning.

91 It was you who rescued **Abraham** from the godlessness of his forefathers and made him inheritor of  
92 the world; and revealed your Christ to him; you chose **Melchizedek** to be high-priest of your service;  
93 you declared your long-suffering servant **Job** to be the victor over the serpent, the origin of evil; you  
94 made Isaac the child of promise; you made **Jacob** the father of twelve sons, and his descendants to  
95 become a multitude, and brought him into Egypt with seventy-five souls. You, Lord, did not despise  
96 **Joseph** but, as a reward of his chastity for your sake, gave him the rule over the Egyptians. You, Lord,  
97 because of your promises to their Fathers, did not despise the Hebrews when they were oppressed by  
98 the Egyptians, but you rescued them and punished the Egyptians.

100 And when men destroyed the law of nature and **taught that the Creation had created itself**, or hon-  
101 ored it more than they should, making it equal to you, God of all, you did not allow them to go astray,  
102 but revealed your holy servant Moses and through him gave them the written law in aid of nature, you  
103 showed that the Creation was your work and expelled the error of polytheism. You glorified **Aaron**  
104 and his descendants with the honor of priesthood, you punished the Hebrews when they sinned, and  
105 received them when they turned back.

107 You avenged them on the Egyptians with the ten plagues, you divided the sea and led the Israelites

108 through, you drowned and destroyed the pursuing Egyptians. You sweetened the bitter water with wood,  
109 you poured water from the precipitous rock, you rained manna from heaven, and quails as food from  
110 the air. (You set up) a pillar of fire for light by night and a pillar of cloud for shadow from the heat by day.  
111 You declared **Joshua** to be leader, you destroyed through him the seven nations of the Canaanites, you  
112 parted Jordan, you dried up the rivers of Etham, you laid walls low without machines or human hands.  
113 For all things glory be to you, almighty Lord. You are worshipped by unnumbered armies of angels,  
114 archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, virtues, eternal armies. The cherubim and the  
115 six-winged seraphim with two wings covering their feet, with two their heads, and with two flying,  
116 together with thousands of thousands or archangels and myriads of myriads of angels say unceasingly,  
117 never resting their voices:

119 **All the people say:** Holy, holy, holy (is the) Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of his  
120 glory; blessed (is he) for ever. Amen.

122 **The bishop continues:** Truly you are holy and all-holy, most high and exalted above all forever.

124 Holy also is your only-begotten Son, our Lord and God Jesus the Christ, who ministered to you, his God  
125 and Father, in all things, in the varieties of creation, and in appropriate forethought. He did not despise  
126 the race of men as it perished; but after the law of nature and the warnings of the Law and the reproofs  
127 of the prophets and the guardianship of the angels, when they were violating the natural and written law,  
128 and casting out of memory the Flood, the burning (of Sodom), the plagues of the Egyptians, and the  
129 slaughter of the Palestinians, and were all about to perish as never yet, by your counsel it pleased him  
130 who was **MAKER OF MAN TO BECOME MAN**, the LAWGIVER TO BE UNDER THE LAW, the **HIGH-PRIEST TO BE THE**  
131 **SACRIFICE**, the **SHEPHERD TO BE A SHEEP**.

PARADOX

133 And he propitiated you, his own God and Father, and reconciled you to the world, and freed all men  
134 from the impending wrath. He was born of a virgin, God the Word made in the flesh, the beloved Son,  
135 the firstborn of all Creation, according to the prophecies spoken beforehand by him concerning himself,  
136 from the seed of David and Abraham, of the tribe of Judah. He **WHO FASHIONS ALL WHO ARE BEGOTTEN**  
137 **WAS MADE IN A VIRGIN'S WOMB**; the **FLESHLESS BECAME FLESH**; he **WHO WAS BEGOTTEN OUTSIDE TIME WAS**  
138 **BEGOTTEN IN TIME**.

PARADOX

140 He lived a holy life and taught according to the law; he drove away every disease and every sickness  
141 from men; he did signs and wonders among the people; he **WHO FEEDS THOSE WHO NEED FOOD AND FILLS**  
142 **ALL THINGS LIVING WITH PLENTIFULNESS PARTOOK OF FOOD AND DRINK AND SLEEP**; he made known your  
143 name to those who did not know it; he put ignorance to flight; he re-kindled piety; he fulfilled your will; he  
144 accomplished the work which you gave him.

146 And when he had achieved all these things, he was seized by the hands of lawless so-called priests and  
147 high-priests and a lawless people, by betrayal through one who was diseased with wickedness. He  
148 suffered many things at their hands, endured all kinds of indignity by your permission, and was handed  
149 over to Pilate the governor. The **JUDGE WAS JUDGED** and the **SAVIOR WAS CONDEMNED**; he **WHO CANNOT**  
150 **SUFFER WAS NAILED TO THE CROSS**, he **WHO IS IMMORTAL BY NATURE DIED**, and the **GIVER OF LIFE WAS BURIED**,  
151 that he might free from suffering and rescue from death those for whose sake he came, and break the  
152 bonds of the devil, and deliver men from his deceit.

PARADOX

154 And on the third day he **ROSE FROM THE DEAD**, and after spending forty days with his disciples, he was  
155 taken up into heaven and sits at your right hand, his God and Father.

157 Remembering therefore what he endured for us, we give you thanks, almighty God, not as we ought but  
158 as we are able, and we fulfill his command.

160 For in the night he was betrayed, he took bread in his holy and blameless hands and, looking up to you,  
161 His God and Father, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is the mystery of the new  
162 covenant: take of it, eat; this is my body which is broken for many for forgiveness of sins." Likewise also  
163 he mixed the cup of wine and water and sanctified it and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from this, all of  
164 you; this is my blood which is shed for many for forgiveness of sins. Do this for my remembrance, for as  
165 often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim my death, until I come."

167 Remembering then his Passion and death and resurrection from the dead, his return to heaven and his

## LIFE OF JESUS

### CHRISTOLOGY

*Note the recapitulation of earlier history in terms of Jesus, and especially the paradoxical Christological formulations here.*

### SOTERIOLOGY / ATONEMENT

*Note the multiple images for the atonement here: propitiation, reconciliation, freedom*

*Note the attention here to Jesus' teaching, a topic left unmentioned in the Nicene Creed of the same period.*

*Note here the use of the term*

### REMEMBRANCE

*to extend into the future. The term remembrance (Greek anamnesis) means, roughly, "to call to mind or contemplate an identity-shaping event." There is nothing illogical, in this sense, about remembering the future.*

## PENTECOST/ PNEUMATOLOGY

### THEOLOGY OF LORD'S SUPPER

*Here is the section of the prayer that later gave rise to the theologies of the Lord's Supper that the Reformers would resist.*

### SANCTIFICATION

*In "Creeds and Confessions" compare this summary statement with those in the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism*

### ESCHATOLOGY

### ECCLESIOLOGY

*Note here a set of wide-ranging intercessions, the precursor to the prayers of the people, a.k.a. "the long prayer" in Reformed worship, which was detached from the eucharistic prayer and became an independent entity following the sermon.*

### ESCHATOLOGY

168 future second coming, in which he comes with glory and power to judge the living and the dead, and  
169 to reward each according to his works, **we offer you**, King and God, according to his **commandment**  
170 this bread and this cup, giving you thanks through him that you have deemed us worthy to stand  
171 before you and **to serve you as priests**.  
172

173 And we beseech you to look graciously upon **these gifts set before you**, O God who need nothing, and  
174 accept them in honor of your Christ; and **to send down your Holy Spirit** upon **this sacrifice**, the  
175 witness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, that he may **make this bread body of your Christ, and this**  
176 **cup blood of your Christ**;

- 177 • **that those who partake of it may be strengthened to piety,**
- 178 • **obtain forgiveness of sins,**
- 179 • **be delivered from the devil and his deceit,**
- 180 • **be filled with the Holy Spirit,**
- 181 • **become worthy of your Christ,**
- 182 • **and obtain eternal life, after reconciliation with you, almighty Master.**  
183

184 Further we pray to you, Lord, for your holy Church from one end of the world to the other, which you  
185 redeemed with the precious blood of your Christ, that **you would guard it unshaken and sheltered until**  
186 **the consummation of the age**; and for all bishops who rightly divide the word of truth.

- 187 • And we entreat you also **for my worthless self who offer to you, and for all the priesthood**, for  
188 the deacons and all the clergy, that you would instruct them all and fill them with Holy Spirit.
- 189 • And we entreat you, Lord, **for the Emperor and those in authority** and all the army, that they  
190 may be peace able towards us, that we may live the while of our life in quietness and concord,  
191 and glorify you through Jesus Christ our hope.
- 192 • And we offer to you also **for all those saints** who have been well-pleasing to you from ever  
193 lasting: patriarchs, prophets, righteous men, apostles, martyrs, confessors, bishops, priests,  
194 deacons, subdeacons, readers, singers, virgins, widows, laymen, and all whose names you  
195 know.
- 196 • And we offer to you **for this people**, that you would make them **a royal priesthood, a holy**  
197 **nation, to the praise of your Christ**; for those in virginity and chastity, for the widows of the  
198 Church, for those in holy marriage and child-bearing, for the infants among your people, that  
199 you may make none of us a castaway.
- 200 • And we ask you **on behalf of this city and those who live in it**, for those in illness, those in  
201 bitter slavery, **those in exile, those whose goods have been confiscated**, for sailors and  
202 travelers, that you would become the help of all, their aid and support.
- 203 • And we entreat you **for those that hate and persecute us** for the sake of your name, for  
204 those who are outside and have gone astray, that you would turn them back to good and soften  
205 their hearers.
- 206 • And we entreat you also **for the catechumens of the Church**, for those distressed by the  
207 Alien, and for those in penitence among our brothers, that you would perfect the first in the  
208 faith, and cleanse the second from the works of the devil, and receive the repentance of the  
209 third, and forgive them and us our transgressions.
- 210 • And we offer to you also **for a mild climate and an abundant harvest**, that we may partake of  
211 the good things from you without lack, and unceasingly praise you, who give food to all flesh.
- 212 • And we entreat you also **for those who are absent for good cause**, that you would preserve  
213 us all in piety, and gather us without change, without blame, without reproach in the kingdom of  
214 your Christ, the God of all sentient and rational nature, our King.  
215

216 For [through him] (is due) to you all glory, worship, and thanksgiving, [and through you and after you  
217 to him in] the Holy Spirit honor and adoration, **now and always and to the ages of ages**, unailing and  
218 unending.

219  
220 **And all the people say: Amen.**