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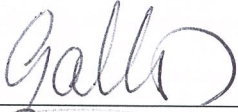
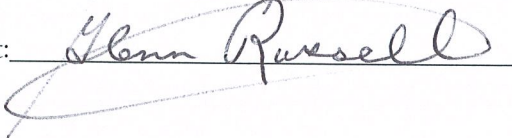
HONS 497
Honors Thesis

An Evaluation of Footwashing as Practiced by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

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April 6, 2018

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Introduction:

The Lord's Supper (also known as Holy Communion) is one of the chief ceremonies performed by most Christian denominations throughout the world. Participants take part in a ritual of repentance and remembrance as they commemorate Christ's sacrifice by partaking of the unleavened bread and wine as symbols of Christ's body and blood. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church also partakes in this ceremony, however it introduces another element. In Adventist communion services, participants also perform the ritual of footwashing, where members of the congregation wash each other's feet in remembrance of Christ's example of humility and service to his disciples. Other Christian denominations seldom perform footwashing as fervently or to the extent that SDA's do.¹ While some churches may consider footwashing as an optional component of the ceremony or limit the footwashing to a few select participants, Seventh-Day Adventists regard it as a vital component of Communion and invite all members to participate, although some may decline for a variety of reasons.

The Gospel of John chapter 13:1-17 lays the biblical foundation for the ritual of footwashing, where Jesus washes his disciple's feet and instructs them to follow his example: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:14-15). Although the gospel of John does give a thorough account of the footwashing with his disciples, there is no mention of the partaking of the bread and wine as depicted in the Gospels of Matthew (Mat. 26:26-29), Mark (Mark 14:22-25), and Luke (Luke 22:14-22). Likewise, the synoptic gospels offer no mention of footwashing as in John 13. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul writes much on the

¹ The Roman Catholic Church only practices foot washing in cathedrals and monastic churches on Maundy Thursday (Thursday before easter) and limits the participants to twelve select men. Denominations such as the Lutheran, Anglican, and Methodist churches follow this Catholic tradition. Anabaptists and Mennonites only practice footwashing in some select communities. A few churches that practice footwashing regularly are the Primitive Baptists and the Church of God. See Ernest Graf, "The Washing of Feet on Maundy Thursday," Catholic Culture, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=2648>; "Foot Washing," New World Encyclopedia, October 2, 2008, accessed October 30, 2017, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Foot_Washing.

practice and meaning of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:24-26) without any mention of footwashing while the only mention of footwashing in Pauline literature is in 1 Timothy 5:10 where it only comes into mention as a sign of good works. Given that footwashing reminds us of Christ's servitude rather than his sacrifice, there seems to be no obvious or direct thematic connection between footwashing and the Lord's Supper other than they allegedly occur on the same night (even though some scholars doubt whether these events happened on the same night).²

As mentioned before, the Seventh-day Adventist Church places footwashing as a vital part of Communion service, and this fact may lead members to take for granted that both elements go hand-in-hand biblically. The church thoroughly articulates the significance of footwashing in itself as a rite of humility mandated by Christ which spiritually prepares us for the partaking of the Lord's Supper³. However, many members may not reflect on whether it belongs in the same ceremony as the Lord's Supper according to scripture, or if it carried the same importance. Consequently, it is possible footwashing within the Adventist Church may be a result more of borrowed tradition rather than biblical principle. My goal in conducting this honors thesis is to find the biblical, theological, and historical reasons for why Seventh-Day Adventists perform footwashing and the Lord's Supper in the same ceremony. A more thorough analysis of the scriptural texts depicting footwashing and the Lord's Supper could help us discern whether there is a strong thematic connection that justifies their joining into one ceremony. Additionally, research into the origins of the practice of footwashing within the Early Christian church and the Early SDA church will help us discern whether the way that the SDA Church performs communion is based on biblical principle or

² Scholars such as Craig S. Kenner point out the difference in date between the synoptic gospels and John, but argue that they must have happened on the same night, and one of the accounts must represent the correct day. See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol 2. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 902. However, others such as Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylén argue that this difference with the synoptics represents a theological difference with the Eucharist, and thus, the two rites should not be compared theologically. See Gail R. O'Day, and Susan Hylén, *John*, Westminster Bible Companion, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006,) 162.

³ Herbert Kiesler, "The Ordinances: Baptism, Footwashing, and Lord's Supper," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen. Vol. 12. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 592-5.

Christian tradition. My hope is that the conclusions drawn from this investigation will either confirm the SDA standing or make us reflect deeply whether we should make changes to our way of performing communion.

Methodology:

The first step in the process of investigation involves the careful exegesis of John 13:12-17 along with the parallel passages found in the synoptic gospels. This step requires a careful translation and exegesis of the original Greek text followed by an extensive use of biblical commentaries (from Adventist scholars as well as scholars of other denominations). Exegesis entails a grammatical examination of the original greek, an analysis of the passage in its literal and historical context, and finding its references and connections to other passages in scripture. By the end of this step, my personal translation of the biblical passages along with input from other scholars should provide me with the sufficient tools to evaluate whether the Seventh-Day Adventist practice of footwashing proves biblically and theologically sound. The second step in this process would be to find any sources of the origin/abandonment of footwashing as a customary ritual in the writings of the early church fathers. The goal of this step in the investigation would be to find the reasons for why footwashing was introduced and/or abandoned into the liturgy, in order to verify whether the reasons were biblically sound. This step would only involve writings made before the first council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.⁴ It should also be helpful to find the origins of its practice within adventism in the mid-1800's, and study the reasons for why the founders decided to implement footwashing into the communion ceremony. I believe this methodology will help me to appropriately pursue the goals of this project.

⁴The first council of Nicaea is the earliest recorded meeting of bishops in the early church, the purpose of which was to discuss church doctrine. It is most often considered the first step in creating the system which would then form the Roman Catholic church.

Findings (Exegetical):

Justifying Footwashing Alone:

Before tackling the question of whether church members ought to perform foot-washing along with the Lord's Supper, I believe it is best to first clarify whether the observance of foot-washing is necessary according to John 13. The key is in verses 14-15 where Christ states, "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."⁵ The first thing to note is the use of the verb *οφείλω*, which translates as *ought* or *obliged*, communicating a sense of necessity.⁶ At first glance, this mandate may seem less imperative than other mandates that Jesus makes in the Gospels. Take for instance the mandate for baptism in Matthew 28:19 which makes use of an imperative verb "Go therefore and *make* disciples..." modified by the participle "*baptizing* [βαπτίζοντες] them". Likewise, Christ's mandate to continue partaking of the Lord's Supper employs the imperative "...do *this* [τοῦτο ποιεῖτε] in remembrance of me." In John 13 Jesus gives a clear indication that foot-washing is a crucial and necessary rite for his followers as Jesus states, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." In his own exegesis of John 13, John Christopher Thomas notes: "The verb *οφείλω* further highlights the mandatory nature of the act. *οφείλω* carries with it the idea of necessity and/or obligation."⁷

Furhtermore, The word used for *example* in verse 15, ὑποδειγματα, can also translate to *copy* or *prototype*, indicating that the author intends to communicate that this act serves as the model for all

⁵ All Biblical quotes in the exegetical portion of this paper will feature my personal translation rather than any published edition of the Bible.

⁶ Throughout the synoptic gospels, the authors usually employ *οφείλω* as *owe* (Matthew 18, 23; Luke 7,11, 16), however throughout the gospel of John and in other Johannine literature, particularly the epistles, *οφείλω* is usually translated as *ought* carrying the connotation of necessity.

⁷ John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 2nd Ed (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2014), 106.

to copy or imitate.⁸ It is also worth noting that this is the only instance that any of the gospel writers use the word ὑποδειγματα, drawing specificity to the act which Jesus has just performed. Jesus finally gives a third instruction to practice foot-washing in verse 17, but this time emphasizing the benefits of this action: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

At this point, I should mention that there is some ambiguity as to whether Christ orders to follow his example in a literal or a spiritual way (a spiritual interpretation would be to simply follow his example of humility and servitude instead of practicing foot-washing). However, I believe the mandate entails the literal practice of footwashing, because at the point where Jesus gives the command in verse 14-15, the only reference for ὑποδειγματα is the act of foot washing. Also, Jesus issues a separate command to imitate his love towards other a few verses later in John 13:34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” Upon analysis of these elements, I believe that this passage does mandate a continued practice of foot-washing.

Many scholars would not agree with my conclusion, as many argue that the mandate given in John 13 does not call for an exact imitation of the physical act, rather that it is a mandate to serve others by following the example that Christ symbolized in this act. For example Kenneth O. Gangel states: “Certainly there can be no harm in the literal practice of foot-washing, but the symbolism of first-century behavior seem more appropriately replicated in the way we serve people in a variety of ways”.⁹ Likewise, R.C.H. Lenski argues that the verb *οφειλω* (ought) carries the same weight as the verb *εντολη* (command), however the obligation is moral and spiritual rather than literal. In other words, Jesus did not mean to establish a new ordinance.¹⁰ Other scholars concur with this conclusion, however some point out that the practice of foot-washing as an ordinance may have

⁸ Other instances of ὑποδειγματα include Hebrews 8:5, 9:23; 2 Peter 2:6

⁹ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*, Ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1999), 251.

¹⁰ R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1964), 927.

been anticipated by the gospel writer, such as Craig S. Keener who states that "...it is very likely that John would approve, and it is even possible that he did intend his audience to practice such a symbol."¹¹ Even though these scholars recognize the obligatory nature of the command, they choose not to interpret it literally.

Other exegetes have argued that the mandate is to be taken literally, but only to a certain extent. For instance, Richard Bauckham makes the argument that the command was for his disciples to wash each other's feet in the context of ordinary life rather than a religious ordinance. He states: "Those exegetes who see in verses 14-15 the institution of a special religious rite of foot washing miss the ordinariness of foot washing as one of the most frequent of life's chores."¹² He backs up his argument by comparing foot-washing to the Eucharist, arguing that the Eucharist had no significance outside of Jesus' command, while foot-washing was practiced as a humble service regularly practiced in ordinary life.¹³ Other scholars who advocate for the interpretation of literal foot washing as a mandate often refer to the specific and assertive language used in the text as indications that the command is for literal footwashing. J.C. Thomas also appeals to the interpretation of the intended audience of the gospel: "It seems improbable that either the disciples (in the narrative) or the implied readers would understand such emphatic language as not having primary reference to the actual practice of footwashing."¹⁴ Another scholar, R. V. G. Tasker, in his commentary of the book of John also considers the fact that the event allegedly took place on

¹¹ Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 902.

¹² Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 195.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 110-111.

Passover illustrates the sacramental nature of Jesus' command.¹⁵ These are all very important contextual elements to consider in addition to the text itself.

In conclusion on this topic, I find that there is a clear mandate to follow Christ's example in John 13:14-17. Upon further analysis of the language used, in addition to the historical and semantic context, I find that the command entails the practice of footwashing itself in addition to humility and servitude.

Uniting Footwashing with the Lord's Supper

After having concluded that the practice of foot washing is indeed necessary, I must address the elements and connections that justify its practice in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, the first of which is the temporal connection between these two events. The challenge is that there is an apparent disparity between the day that the footwashing occurred in John 13 and the day that the Lord's Supper occurs in the synoptic gospels. In verse 1, John apparently places the event in time by saying "Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come..." and proceeding with the narrative of the foot-washing. The setting presented in John contrasts with the synoptic accounts of the Lord's Supper in which the event is placed on "the first day of Unleavened Bread" (Mat. 26:17, Mark 14:12, Luke 22: 7).

Scholars and authors who interpret these events as happening on different days also conclude that there is a theological gap between both events. For example, Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylen claim in their commentary of the book of John that the fact that both events happen on distinct days makes it irrelevant to look for particular theological connections between the Eucharist and the foot-washing.¹⁶ Similarly, Ernst Haenchen addresses these events as separate, and as a result

¹⁵ "The fact that the washing of the feet took place at Passover with all the implications of that festival for this evangelist... all tends to show that in this sacramental action Jesus is illustrating the cleaning power of this death." R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John*, 2nd Ed., (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 1983) 154-155.

¹⁶ Gail R. O'Day and Susan Hylen, *John*, 162.

does not read John 13:1-17 as having any christological significance: “Jesus’ act of foot washing is not conceived in this passage as the meaning of the cross, as the salvific self-humiliation of divine love; rather, how the relation of a christian to another really takes the place of relation of God to Man, Jesus to man.”¹⁷ If we consider the Eucharist and the foot-washing as separate events, it is harder to justify their union in one ceremony, as that temporal disparity may also represent a theological disparity, as some scholars point out.

While there are valid arguments to conclude that foot-washing and the Eucharist happened on different days, I believe that this interpretation overlooks another possible interpretation of John 13:1. The first part of the text “Before the feast of passover...” is the only clue as to when the foot-washing took place, and it does not specify the exact day the event took place.¹⁸ Scholars who adhere to the separate day theory would say that this prepositional phrase refers to the time in which the events of the following verses and chapters occur. However, we could also interpret that this prepositional phrase only modifies the statement that follows it, “...Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father.” (John 13:1) If we were to re-translate the passage to fit this interpretation, it would read as follows: “Jesus already knew before the feast of passover that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father.” In other words, “Before the feast of passover...” does not necessarily define the point in time where the foot-washing is carried out. This reading of John 13:1, which numerous scholars have supported, allows for the possibility of the

¹⁷ Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Trans. Robert W. Funk, Ed. Ulrich Busse (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1984), 108.

¹⁸ According to the Gospel of John, we can place John 13 temporally sometime in the five days before Passover (John 12:1, 12; 18:28).

foot-washing taking place on the first day of passover in conjunction with the instituting of the Last Supper.¹⁹

This understanding of John 13:1 is the most contextually coherent for a few reasons. For one, it reconciles the fact that John 13 shares certain developments with the synoptic accounts of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22); namely, the revealing of the betrayer (v. 21-30) and the foretelling of Peter's denial (v. 36-38).²⁰ If these accounts are placed on separate days, would it not seem redundant for these actions to occur twice in the span of just a few days? In this regard, it is more sensible to temporally unite both accounts into one night. Additionally, the gospel of John seems to anticipate passover as a focal point in the narrative, and seeing how John 13:1 is the last reference to Passover, it makes little sense that the gospel writer would have excluded the event altogether. With these elements in mind, we can safely arrive to the conclusion that John 13 occurs on the first day of Passover in conjunction with the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Although both events happened on the same day, there is another barrier that impedes an obvious connection between footwashing and the Lord's Supper, which is that John 13 makes no direct reference to the Lord's Supper. Regardless of this fact, there is a clear reference to the eucharist in John 6, where Jesus preaches that he is the bread of life. The gospel writer uses clear eucharistic language in the following verse: "So Jesus said again, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you'" (John 6:53). This allusion proves that John, the writer of this gospel, had the eucharist in mind when he wrote this passage, and he also had a clear understanding of its meaning.

¹⁹ William Hendriksen identifies the different theories regarding the disparities between John and the synoptics and attempting to reconcile them: (1) a true solution which takes into account all the data of scripture has not been proposed (2) The Synoptics are right. John is wrong (3) John is right, the synoptics are wrong (4) Both John and the Synoptics refer to this event on Thursday before passover. Hendriksen adheres to the fourth option due to his interpretation that the preposition "before" modifies the verb "knowing" in verse 1. R.C.H. Lenski also makes the same argument, concluding that John 13 takes place on Passover Thursday. See William Hendriksen, Simon J. Kristemaker (Ed.), *New Testament Commentary: John* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 1954), 221-3.; Lenski, *John*, 903.

²⁰ It is worth noting that although John presents little variation regarding the foretelling of Peter's denial, the reveal of Judas as the Betrayer is notably different from the synoptic accounts.

Scholars have made valid arguments for John's exclusion of the eucharist in chapter 13, often appealing to the possibility that John expected his readers to be familiar with it already. Tasker explains the omission of the eucharist as follows: "...John's readers would be very familiar with it. In the ceremony of the feet-washing and the teaching that follows, the meaning of Jesus is conveyed to the disciples in equally dramatic manner." In this way, the foot-washing serves as the parallel event to the Lord's Supper in John's narrative.²¹ In a similar manner, Bauckham also views footwashing as the Johannine equivalent to the Lord's Supper: "John's omission of such an account must be due, not only to the fact that he has already spoken of Jesus' death in Eucharistic language in chapter 6, but also the fact that he gives Jesus' death a sacrificial interpretation in his narration of the death itself."²² Even though John does not narrate the Lord's supper, as do the synoptics, he does reference its imagery and provides a spiritual equivalent to it. This leads us to probably the most important connection between the Lord's Supper and footwashing, which is the thematic and theological connections .

At first glance, the Lord's Supper and foot-washing may appear to have different meanings. The Lord's Supper has a meaning unequivocally tied to Christ's suffering and sacrifice through its symbolism which scripture makes clear in 1 Corinthians 11:26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." On the other hand, the meaning of foot washing given in John 13 is more ambiguous, according to scholars. Annang Asumang identifies two mainstream scholarly interpretations, namely (1) the soteriological interpretation which interprets footwashing as an act of servitude foreshadowing Christ's ultimate act of service to humanity and (2) the moral/ethical interpretation which claims that the foot washing is nothing more than an example of humble self-sacrificing service of love.²³ If we were to analyze John 13 on

²¹ Tasker, *John*, 154.

²² Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 194.

²³ Annang Asumang, "Washing Another's Feet as Jesus Did: Revelatory Activities and the Progressive Sanctification of Believers," *Conspectus* (South African Theological Seminary), 15 (March 2013): 1-38.

a surface level, it would seem that the text favors the moral/ethical interpretation, which rules out any major thematic correlation with the Lord's Supper, and indeed many scholars favor this reading.²⁴ Nevertheless, I believe the text offers enough material to argue for a soteriological interpretation, which would allow for a thematic tie with the Lord's Supper.

John 13:1-17 features numerous allusions to the impending crucifixion scene.

In verse 1 there is already foreshadowing of what is to come when the narrative states "... Jesus knew that the hour had come his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." "His hour" refers to the hour of his death, where salvation will be decided,²⁵ and "until the end" could also be interpreted as another allusion to the cross.²⁶ In verse 2, John mentions Judas' impending betrayal of Jesus and later on in verses 10-11 he continues to remind the reader of Judas' betrayal. Craig R. Koester points out the significance of these passages in relation to the cross: "The Gospel links the foot washing to the crucifixion by framing the episode with references to the impending betrayal"²⁷ Also, when Peter questions Jesus' actions, Jesus responds: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (John 13:7). This verse implies that neither Peter nor the disciples will understand the meaning of this footwashing until after his death, linking the meaning to his

²⁴ A brief overview of scholars who claim that John 13 has no thematic connection to the eucharist is presented on page 7 of this paper.

²⁵ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 76.

²⁶ In the Greek text, εἰς τέλος could be interpreted "until the end" or "completely." Many scholars understand that this phrase offers a double meaning, that both translations apply. See Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 77; Grant R. Osborne, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: John*, ed. Phillip W. Comfort, Vol. 13 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 196; Craig R. Koester also draws a connection between this phrase and Jesus' final words "it is finished" in John 19:30. See Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 111.

²⁷ Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel*, 111.

sacrifice.²⁸ These allusions and foreshadowings that are imbedded in the footwashing narrative hint that this passage is inevitably linked with the crucifixion.

Another notable element in John 13 that brings Christ's sacrifice to mind is the language used in verse 4: "[Jesus] rose from supper. He laid down his outer garment, took up a towel, and tied it around his waist." The use of the verbs *τιθημι* (lay down) and *λαμβανω* (take up) is significant because they most often appear in the gospel of John when talking about Christ's death. Take John 10:17-18 as an example: "the reason the Father loves Me is that I lay down My life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."²⁹ In his analysis of John 13, Thomas concurs with the significance of these two verbs and finds two other elements that foreshadow the crucifixion, namely, (1) "there is a foreshadowing in the foot washing of the humiliation and cleansing connected with Jesus laying down his life." and (2) "The stark reality of nakedness also presents a clear reference to the crucifixion."³⁰ The detail with which John chooses to describe the action of foot-washing in this verse foreshadows Christ's sacrifice in different aspects.

Scholars have recognized other elements that connect the Lord's Supper with the crucifixion. Thomas points out the location of John 13:1-20 within the literary context of the gospel. Most scholars often split the gospel in two parts, the first part often being labeled "Book of Signs" and the second "Book of Glory," with the division occurring between chapters 12 and 13.³¹ The foot-washing takes place at the very beginning of the Book of Glory, and according to Thomas it

²⁸ Thomas argues that "As with many crucial Johannine episodes the foot washing can only be understood fully after the crucifixion/resurrection." See Thomas, *Footwashing*, 88

²⁹ In about half of the instances in which John uses *τιθημι* and *λαμβανω*, they are used in reference to the crucifixion. Other instances include John 13:17, 38; 15:31.

³⁰ Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 83. Other scholars who agree with the significance of the verbs *τιθημι* and *λαμβανω* as references to the crucifixion are Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 902; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *New Testament Commentary: John*, Ed. Robert Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 404; Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 214.

³¹ Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 56.

signifies that the foot washing has great importance because, “it graphically introduces the idea of the passion and does so in a way that communicates benefits to those who have responded in faith: the disciples.”³² Also, R.V.G. Tasker stresses the importance of the foot-washing being carried out after the meal had begun: “. . .that it was enacted during or after, and not before it as thought were a substitute for the customary washing by slaves of the feet of guests; and the significant way in which the incident is related, all tends to show that in this sacramental action Jesus is illustrating the cleaning power of this death.”³³

In conclusion to the exegetical portion of this research, I find that John 13:1-17 presents a clear mandate to practice foot-washing just as he also mandated the observance of the Last Supper. Also, in spite of the fact there is no narrative featuring the Lord’s Supper in the gospel of John, there are enough references and semantic connections between foot-washing and the crucifixion to support a soteriological interpretation of John 13:1-17, making it a spiritual equal to the synoptic accounts of the Lord’s Supper. These elements show that there is scriptural support for the dual practice of the Lord’s Supper and foot-washing in the Seventh-Day Adventist church.

Findings (Historical):

Early Church (1st-4th Century AD)

According to John 13, Jesus issues the command for the performance of footwashing to his disciples, who would go on to form the Christian church, known then as “The Way,”³⁴ therefore, we should expect that mutual footwashing was a common practice throughout the Christian world in its inception. This does seem to be the case when we consider the only other mention of footwashing in the New Testament found in 1 Timothy 5:9, 10: “Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than

³² Ibid., 58.

³³ Tasker, *John*, 154-155.

³⁴ Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has *washed the feet of the saints*, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.” Historically, footwashing was a sign of hospitality and usually performed by servants, not by the host/hostess,³⁵ also evidenced by scripture.³⁶ With this in mind, it is notable that footwashing is mentioned separate from hospitality in this passage, indicating that it carries a distinct meaning, perhaps a religious one. Thomas also draws attention to the fact that the text indicates that footwashing is to be performed for the saints: “The footwashing is distinguished from the other good works in that this service is restricted to the household of faith, for it is the feet of the ‘saints’ that are to be washed. If this footwashing is simply an illustrative reference to hospitality, why is it restricted to the saints?”³⁷ Although this passage represents the only mention of footwashing in the New Testament outside of John 13, it does provide some evidence for its practice in the first century.

Regarding the next few centuries, there is some evidence regarding the practice of ritual footwashing in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. One of the most prominent comes from Tertullian [c. 155- c. 220] who writes in *De Corona* [c. 210]³⁸:

I must recognize Christ, both as He reclines on a couch, and when He presents a basin for the feet His disciples, and when He pours water into it from an ewer, and when He is girt about with a linen towel — a garment specially sacred to Osiris. It is thus in general I reply upon the point, admitting indeed that we use along with other these articles, but challenging that this be judged in the light of the distinction between things agreeable and things opposed to reason. . . For we affirm that those things only are proper to be used, whether by ourselves or by those who lived before us, and alone befit the service of God and Christ Himself.³⁹

³⁵ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 26-32; Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 190.

³⁶ Verses where footwashing is mentioned as a sign of hospitality: Genesis 18:4; 19:2; Judges 19:21, 1 Samuel 25:41.

³⁷ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 136.

³⁸ *De Corona* is a treatise on Christianity and military service in which Tertullian writes abundantly on how Christians should relate to pagans and pagan objects, providing the context for the discussion on footwashing.

³⁹ Cited according to the translation of Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), III, p.98.

In this text, Tertullian admits that the Christian community to which he belongs (as well as other communities) practices ritual footwashing. Not only that, but he also claims that past generations also took part in footwashing. We can conclude from this text that footwashing as a rite was very much alive in the next centuries after its institution. However, the text does not discuss the religious context in which footwashing was practiced, so we cannot ascertain whether it was practiced in conjunction with the Lord's Supper.

Scholars have identified other possible evidences for the practice of footwashing throughout the early Christian world. Thomas points out another instance where Tertullian may refer to ritual footwashing in his discussion of the Agape feast where he lists "manual ablution" among the parts of the ceremony.⁴⁰ According to Thomas, this passage also gives evidence for footwashing being connected to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Additionally, he claims that there is an allusion to footwashing in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* [c. 156] in how the text describes the removal of Polycarp's shoes and washing of his body before execution.⁴¹ In an outline of the history of footwashing, Marco Valenca acknowledges Tertullian's mention of the rite and also provides evidence for its practice in Spain during the 3rd - 4th centuries in the *Synod of Elvira* [c. 305] where there is record of the clergy being forbidden to wash the feet of the recently baptized, indicating that it was practiced regularly in that region before this point.⁴² These sources further solidify the notion that footwashing was practiced in the early Christian church in a variety of contexts not limited to the Lord's Supper, but also martyrdom and monasticism.⁴³

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Footwashing*, 140.

⁴¹ Ibid, 138-9.

⁴² Marco A. Valenca, "Footwashing: Basis for its Practice in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church," (Term Paper, Andrews University, 1980), 10.

⁴³ It should be noted that Richard Bauckham dismisses Thomas' interpretation of some of his sources as 'speculative' and 'unfounded' in his critique of Thomas found in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 197.

We also have evidence of how the early church interpreted John 13. For example, Irenaeus [c. 130-c. 202] in his work *Against Heresies* [c. 180] relates footwashing to the cleaning of sins: "...so at last, by means of the New Man, all who from the beginning [were His] disciples, having been cleansed and washed from things pertaining to death, should come to the life of God. For He who washed the feet of the disciples sanctified the entire body and rendered it clean."⁴⁴ Irenaeus offers this theological interpretation but he does not mention any connection to the Eucharist, nor does he emphasize the importance of the literal practice of footwashing. There is also mention of Christ's footwashing in *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* [latter 3rd century] regarding the service that deacons ought to provide: "By doing this He demonstrated to us His kindness and brotherly affection, that so we also might do the same to one another."⁴⁵ This text does not emphasize that this rite should be performed literally, however, rather the deacons ought to imitate Christ's humility. We find a similar interpretation expressed in the Epistles of Cyprian [c. 200-258]:

"Let them imitate the Lord, who at the very time of his passion was not more proud, but humble. For then He washed His disciples' feet saying 'If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you' (Epistle 5.2)."⁴⁶

These sources help us discern how the Early Church Fathers interpreted the command given in John 13.

As discussed in the exegetical portion of this paper, most people interpret Jesus' command in John 13:14-15 either as a spiritual command to imitate his humility or a command to practice footwashing literally, and it is clear that the early church fathers adhere to the spiritual interpretation. Although we do find evidences of its practice throughout the first three centuries, we never find a text where literal footwashing is encouraged as an essential ordinance by any of the Ante-Nicene fathers, much less do we find an instance where footwashing was clearly performed along with with

⁴⁴ Roberts & Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I, 493.

⁴⁵ Roberts & Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, VII, 432.

⁴⁶ Roberts & Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, V, 283.

the Lord's Supper. Consequently, we cannot identify an point in time where the Church abandoned literal footwashing as a sacramental rite, as this investigation hoped to find. Valenca shows proof that monastic communities kept the act of footwashing as a rite of hospitality throughout the later centuries, and other regions practiced footwashing customarily on Holy Thursday (a.k.a. Maundy Thursday).⁴⁷ Footwashing remained a localized practice until the Roman Catholic Church introduced the practice of footwashing on Holy Thursday into the liturgy at the Council of Toledo in A.D. 694.⁴⁸ In conclusion, from the historical analysis we can ascertain that the early church in the first centuries grasped the biblical principles behind John 13 (namely humility, service, and cleansing), but they did not enforce the literal mandate of footwashing.

Seventh-Day Adventist History

When tracing the origin of footwashing within the Seventh-Day Adventist church, it is important to acknowledge that due to the church's roots in the Millerite Adventist movement (which was denominationally diverse), the first SDA members came from a variety of religious backgrounds, some of which practiced footwashing. We have evidence of footwashing being practiced in conjunction with the Lord's Supper before the great disappointment in 1844 in an article from "The Midnight Cry" describing a Millerite conference held in the summer of 1844: "Supper being ended, some of us thought it was best also to wash one another's feet, remembering that our Lord and Master washed the disciples' feet, so ought they to wash each other's feet."⁴⁹ From this record, we can see that footwashing was practiced by some (not all) in the Millerite movement before 1844, and it was performed alongside the Lord's Supper. However, since the Millerite's concern before 1844 was the soon coming of the Lord, Millerite followers would have

⁴⁷ Valenca, 11-14.

⁴⁸ Graf, "The Washing of Feet on Maundy Thursday."

⁴⁹ G. W. Peavey, "Conference at Grafton, Vt.," *The Midnight Cry*, VII, No. 3 (August 1, 1844): 22.

considered it unnecessary to argue about these type of rites. Therefore there was not much, if any, discussion about the rite of footwashing prior to the great disappointment.

After the great disappointment, however, the practice of footwashing became a subject of much controversy. Many of Miller's followers interpreted Christ's mandate in John 13 as a call to practice hospitality and humility, but rejected literal footwashing.⁵⁰ In times when modesty was very strict, footwashing was often considered promiscuous, especially when performed on women.⁵¹

Joshua V. Himes (spokesperson for the Advent movement) issued an attack of footwashing in *The Advent Herald*: "We repudiate all these notions of public feet-washings...Adventists have nothing to do with any of these things, as religious exercises."⁵² The leader of the movement, William Miller, agreed with this position as he stated:

Resolved, that we can have no sympathy or fellowship with those things which only have a show of wisdom in will-worship and neglecting of the body... That we have no fellowship with any of the new tests as conditions of salvation,... And that the act of promiscuous feet-washing and the salutation kiss as practiced by some professing Adventists as religious ceremonies,... are not only unscriptural, but subversive, —if persevered in, —of purity and morality.⁵³

It should be noted that this hostility towards footwashing was due in part to some of the more fanatic groups that came out of the Millerite movement, particularly the "spiritualizers," which did adopt some morally shady practices.⁵⁴ Also, I should point out that these attacks by Himes and Miller do not argue from scripture, rather a call for modesty (Biblical arguments against footwashing will be featured later in this paper).

⁵⁰ Franke Jon Zollman, "The Ordinance of Footwashing in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church: from the origin to the mature theology" (Ph.D Dissertation, Andrews University, 1978), p.16-17.

⁵¹ Ellen White addressed this particular issue in *Early Writings*: "There is no example given in the Word for brethren to wash the sisters' feet; but there is an example for sisters to wash the feet of the brethren...All should move understandingly and not make the washing of the feet a tedious ceremony," Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1880), p. 116-117.

⁵² Joshua V. Himes, "Warning to Adventists," *The Advent Herald*, IX, No. 7 (March 26, 1845): 56.

⁵³ William Miller, "Mutual Conference of Adventists at Albany," *The Advent Herald*, IX, No. 14 (May 14, 1845): 107.

⁵⁴ Zollman, p.16-17.

Due to these attacks on footwashing, the main preoccupation of Adventist leaders was to show that literal footwashing is a Biblical mandate. Ellen White's depiction of her first vision (December, 1844) describes footwashing as an act performed by the righteous: "Then it was that the synagogue of Satan knew that God had loved us who could wash one another's feet and salute the brethren with a holy kiss, and they worshiped at our feet."⁵⁵ Similarly, in 1945, J. B. Cook (a Millerite preacher) had his sermon on footwashing published in the journal *Day-Star* in which he said: "The savior's example and command, which are employed to enforce these ordinances, enjoins another ordinance or appointment, which embody the great Gospel of love and subjection one to another in the Lord... If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought to wash one another's feet."⁵⁶ We also have evidence of footwashing being enforced in the early Seventh-Day Adventist community from the words of a hymn found in the first songbook published by James White in 1949: "When Jesus Christ was here below / He taught His people what to do / And if we would His precepts keep, / We must attend to washing feet."⁵⁷ From these texts, we can discern that the first Seventh-Day Adventists mainly adhered to the literal interpretation of John 13:14-15, and practiced footwashing as a biblical ordinance.

As Sabbatarian Adventists began to form an organization in the 1850's, the leaders of the church began to discuss the theology of footwashing, and it is here that we see that the church founders began to make connection between footwashing and the Lord's Supper. Perhaps the most clear explanation of this theology come from Uriah Smith: "We show forth the Lord's death, the shedding of his precious blood, in the Lord's supper; and his burial and resurrection in baptism. To prepare our minds for a better appreciation of these truths, we should follow our Lord's example,

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 15.

⁵⁶ J.B. Cook, "Message from J.B. Cook," *Day Star* (July 1, 1845): 31.

⁵⁷ This reference was provided by Steve Zeller's paper on footwashing in the mid-nineteenth century. Steve Zeller, "The Ordinance of Footwashing," (Term Paper, Andrews University, 1979), 5-6.

and obey his command, in washing one another's feet."⁵⁸ Seventh-Day Adventists still hold to this theology provided by Smith, as his sentiments are echoed in the *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*.⁵⁹ David Hewitt also provided the following argument for performing footwashing with the Lord's Supper in the following way.

...we find in the testimony of the four evangelists that write of the passover supper, in the same evening and same night the Lord's supper was instituted, they washed one another's feet... The above language plainly shows that this is an institution or ordinance to be perpetuated during this dispensation, for the Saviour has commanded it to be kept... Washing feet and the Lord's Supper should be more frequently practiced. Jesus set us the example, and told us to do as he had done. The example of Christ should be as exactly followed as possible."⁶⁰

From these articles written by early SDA leaders, we see how they argued biblically for the unity of footwashing and the Lord's Supper.

The ordinance of footwashing was brought into question again in the late 1850's by some Sabbatarian Adventists who wrote criticisms of literal footwashing in Adventist Journals. One of the prominent articles was from Josiah Litch, who argued that footwashing is classified biblically as a "good work" and not as a biblical mandate, also that Christ meant for his disciples to follow his example of self-less servitude.⁶¹ In response to these articles, Uriah Smith addressed the issues regarding footwashing that people debated, and he issued the following ultimatum: "In conclusion, we invite the honest inquirer after truth on this point, to study carefully the testimony of John xiii. In the articles above referred to, there is, throughout, a manifest evasion of this portion of Scripture, which, of all others, ought to be kept in view in examining this question."⁶² The next notable mention of footwashing come in 1861 in an editorial by James White where he compares

⁵⁸ Uriah Smith, "Conference Address," *Review and Herald*, VIII, No. 12 (July 24, 1856): 97.

⁵⁹ Herbert Kiesler, "The Ordinances: Baptism, Footwashing, and Lord's Supper," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, 592-5.

⁶⁰ David Hewitt, "Remember Lot's Wife," *Review and Herald*, XII, No. 14 (August 19, 1858): 106.

⁶¹ Josiah Litch, "Address on Feet-washing," *The Advent Herald*, XIX, No. 32 (August 7, 1858): 254.

⁶² Uriah Smith, "On Footwashing" *Review and Herald*, XIII, No. 14 (February 24, 1859): 106.

the mandate for footwashing with the mandate for Sabbath-keeping. The way in which he writes on these mandates hints that footwashing had been established firmly as an ordinance in the Seventh-Day Adventist church by then. Also, in a letter from a Brother Bostwick, he mentioned the following:

In the evening after the Sabbath, we convened together to take in members and attend the ordinances of the Lord's house... While we moved forward in the ordinance of feet washing, a sweet unction from on high rested upon us, and we all felt truly happy in following the example of our Saviour. We then broke bread...⁶³

From these articles, we can discern that the Seventh-Day Adventist church went through a process of studying scripture carefully before instituting footwashing as an ordinance. Therefore, the practice of footwashing is not a result of tradition, rather biblical study.

Conclusion:

The Seventh-Day Adventist church regards footwashing and the lord's supper as chief ordinances, and both are inseparable in the eyes of the church and its members. The goal of this research was to verify if that stance is biblically and theologically sound. Through an extensive exegesis of the footwashing narrative, I found that there are temporal and theological connections between both rites that justify the SDA practice. In my historical research of the early church, I failed to find when the church abandoned the practice of performing footwashing with the Eucharist. However, my research regarding footwashing in the early SDA church yielded fruitful results, showing that the SDA theology of footwashing is a product of study and reflection on the scriptures rather than a borrowed tradition. From this I conclude that the SDA church holds up to its biblical standard in its practice of Communion.

⁶³ James White, "From Bro. Bostwick" *Review and Herald*, XXII, No. 1 (June 2, 1963): 7.

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