

*Church of God History Series*

# Notes on the History of Footwashing among the Sabbatarians

By Craig M White  
Version 1.3





## ***Notes on the History of Footwashing Among the Sabbatarians***

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- *A Note on the Name 'Church of God (Adventist)'*
- *A Note on the Seventh Day Baptist Relationship to the Church of God*
- *Church of God & Sabbatarian Timelines (since the late 1700s)*
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- *Significant Remnant of Israel quotes*
- *The Doctrinal Heritage of the Church of God in the Nineteenth Century*
- *The Final Years of Herbert W Armstrong*
- *The Identity of the German Peoples in Church of God Doctrine*
- *The Independent Sabbatarian Groups c1800-1860. Compilation of Research Notes*
- *Worldwide Church of God Pioneers or Senior Veterans*

**NB:** All of these papers plus a number of charts and tables are available for [download here](#).

"If I then, 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 just as I have done to you."  
(John 13:14-15, ESV)

## Introduction

Given that I have been writing a series on the history of this or that doctrine, the thought popped into my head to assemble what I have collected over the decades on Passover footwashing. I had already released papers on the *history of [Passover and Holy Day Observances since the First Century](#), [Doctrines of the Sabbatarians Since the First Century](#) and another on [Notes on the History of Passover Observance amongst Sabbatarians since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century](#). I regard this paper as a follow-on to the latter.*

This is, however, not a theological discussion concerning footwashing itself; nor a history paper. Rather, it is a collection of information on footwashing over the centuries – including an attempt to find anything possible linking such to Sabbatarians.

All this is so tedious and time-consuming, but a project that is very important to understanding our history.

Of interest to me are connections between the Laws God revealed to Moses and the book of Genesis and whether these Laws were in actual effect or at least proto-types of later Laws. My research into this around 1980 was assembled into the paper [God's Law and Way of Life Before Moses](#).

For example, how Abraham welcomed the Lord and His Angels, washing their feet prior to consuming the unleavened bread (Genesis 18:1-6). Lot also welcomed the Angels, washing their feet before they partook of the unleavened bread (Genesis 19:1-3). Later, Laban washed the feet of Abraham's servant before he ate the unleavened bread (Genesis 24:2-54). In all three instances, the act of washing feet occurs first, followed by eating.

Also, this demonstrates that we ought to have our feet washed before partaking of the unleavened bread and the wine during the Passover memorial service. One justification for this practice is that Christ Himself washed the feet of His disciples before they consumed the unleavened bread and the wine and commanded us to do likewise (John 13:1-30, Matthew 26:17-25).

Notice also the links to Old Testament purity ordinances: Kim Papaioannou in "Baptism & Footwashing - more than symbols", *Ministry*, June 2025, understands this:

"... the New Testament presents baptism and footwashing. When Ananias visits Paul immediately after his Damascus Road experience, he tells him: " 'Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name' " (Acts 22:16). To the Ephesians Paul declares: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. 5:25, 26). Paul calls baptism "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). And Hebrews 10:22 summons us to approach God with

“hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and . . . bodies washed with pure water.”

**The words wash/washing, clean/cleansed, and pure carry ritual connotations. The apostles used ritual language to develop the theology of baptism.** Indeed, the Greek words baptizō/baptismos are also used of ritual washings (e.g., Mark 7:3, 4). The apostles understood baptism as a ritual of purity.” (pp. 16-17)

“Jesus then makes the following amazing statement: “ The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean’ ” (v. 10). Jesus here uses purity language. A person who has bathed—that is, has been baptized—has statutory purity, is clean—as clean as Jews thought a circumcised person was, and even cleaner. What is now needed is footwashing to restore purity in case it has been compromised. [physical] **Sacrifices and ritual washings are no longer necessary because baptism and footwashing will render a person clean on an ongoing basis.** Jesus then adds: “ ‘And you are clean, but not every one of you’ ” (v. 10). Though Judas was probably baptized (John 3:22; 4:1, 2) and had his feet washed, he was still not clean because his heart remained defiled. **Purity ordinances are effective only in a person who believes, who has been purified in the heart.**

Cleansing

We saw that first-century Judaism was obsessed with ritual purity. It attained it by a series of rituals: circumcision, which provided statutory purity, and sacrifices and ritual washings that restored purity when circumstantial defilement occurred. The early church struggled with this topic. On the one hand, Judaizing Christians wanted to continue with the rituals of purity. On the other hand, the apostles realized that true purity comes through the cleansing sacrifice of Jesus. **Both Jesus and the apostles understood baptism and footwashing as purity ordinances, external manifestations of an inner faith,** to the point that Jesus warned Peter that he could be excluded from His presence if he refused footwashing. It is the inner faith together with the outward ordinances that declare a person clean before God (John 3:3, 5)” (p. 17). [emphasis mine]

These washings are also found in Leviticus 16:23-24. Cp. Heb 9:10; Acts 22:16. Have a read of the study [History of Baptism from the Old Testament Period to the End of Time](#) for details. Further information connecting Old Testament Laws to the New Testament can be found in [Old Testament Laws and Spiritual Requirements repeated in the New Testament](#).

## **Footwashing Practiced by Some Christian Groups**

In his article, *Footwashing in Early Christianity* (29 June 2008), Doug Ward notes:

“Bauckham notes that footwashing is mentioned a number of times in the patristic literature, including references in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Pachomius, Caesarius of Arles, Sulpicius Severus, Sozomen, and Benedict of Nursia. Many of these references mention footwashing in the context of everyday hospitality. The Apostolic Constitutions (fourth century A.D.) instructs deacons to wash the feet of the weak and infirm when they visit them (3.19). Some sources also mention a custom of washing the feet of the newly baptized, probably based on John 13:10.” (p 2)

You can read more about the long history of observation of this practice, though not quite the Biblical model, in “Maundy (foot washing)” *Wikipedia*.

Without going into detail (this is already undertaken in papers by others) we can find evidence for footwashing practiced or promoted in some form or other by a number of early ‘Christian’ leaders such as:

- Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) in *Against Heresies* (Book IV, chapter 22): "For He who washed the feet of the disciples sanctified the entire body, and rendered it clean." This interprets Jesus' act symbolically.
- Clement of Alexandria (c. 195 AD) in his comments on 1 Timothy 5:10.
- Tertullian (c. 205 AD in *To His Wife*, and earlier in *De Corona* c. 201 AD).
- Council of Elvira (c. 300–306 AD, Spain): Canon 48.
- Bishop Ambrose of Milan (c. 380 AD).
- Augustine (c. 400 AD): In letters (e.g., to Januarius) and treatise on John (e.g., Tractate 58).
- St. Benedict's Rule (c. 529 AD).

In the **Appendix. Footwashing in the Old and New Testament, the Graeco Roman World, the Early Church, and the Liturgy** by Carmine Pernini, you can read further into the history of this ordinance. However, we do not have to accept every detail of the paper. Rather, it provides us with interesting and useful information.

Centuries later, history records that the Mennonites observed footwashing. See *Mennonite Footwashing: Identity Reflections and Altered Meanings* by Keith Graber-Miller, 3 March 2008. <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/318>

“Although practiced by about 110 denominations in North America<sup>1</sup>, liturgical footwashing - ‘the sacrament that almost made it’ – remains an enigma to many modern religious persons.”

“Since their inception in the 16th century, some Anabaptist groups have practiced footwashing, either as a communal ritual –the primary interest here – or as a hospitable practice for visiting church leaders. However, Anabaptists, unlike Catholics and most Protestants, never articulated a sacramental theology explicating outerinner relationships in rituals, ‘and thus could never completely be at peace with their rites and institutions.’”

It is important to note that many individuals known as Anabaptists practiced footwashing. Oswald Glaid (1490-1546 AD), recognized as one of the earliest and most influential leaders, commenced his teachings on the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath around the years 1527 to 1528. Additionally, Andreas Fischer (c. 1480-c. 1560 AD), another former priest, became affiliated with the Anabaptists and advocated for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Nevertheless, there are no extant primary sources from Glaid or Fischer that explicitly detail their footwashing ceremonies, as most of their writings were either lost or destroyed during periods of severe persecution. However, secondary historical evidence strongly suggests that they adhered to the conventional Anabaptist practices. (refer to Gerhard Hasel, “Sabbatarian Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century (Part I),” *Andrews University Studies*, July 1967, pp.101-121; Gerhard Hasel, “Sabbatarian Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century (Part II),” *Andrews University Studies*, January 1968, pp.19-28).

Another source is *Materials Toward A History Of Feet Washing Among The Baptists* by Robert Vaughn (2008).

This work serves as a compilation of historical references and primary source materials that detail the practice of foot washing, which is regarded as an ordinance in conjunction with baptism and the Lord's Supper, among different Baptist denominations, especially Missionary Baptists. It also includes observations on other groups such as Primitive Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Separate Baptists, and others. The work utilises historical Baptist writings, confessions, associational records, and various other sources to outline this practice throughout Baptist history.

The book *A History of the Baptists: Together with Some Account of Their Principles and Practices* by John Christian (1922) includes a chapter titled "The Waldensian Churches" (chapter 6).

In the book he mentions that the Waldensians practiced footwashing (p. 79) along with other groups over the centuries.

Please note that most of the Waldensians did not observe the seventh-day Sabbath. It must have been in 1977 or 1978 that I discovered Gerard Damsteegt, a Seventh-day Adventist scholar who authored a fascinating book *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* in a Seventh-day Adventist bookshop.

The bookshop also contained a lot of old pre- Seventh-day Adventist and original Seventh-day Adventist literature. Years before, as a youngster, I read their materials in the Port Elizabeth, South Africa library as part of my research. Uriah Smith in particular interested me. The other Seventh-day Adventist bookshops in Strathfield (a suburb of Sydney) and Avondale College also contained much old writings. Nowadays, that has changed and their bookshops are more and more mainstream and lacking the depth of holdings they were previously noted for.

I found the book by Damsteegt intriguing filled with all sorts of fascinating titbits - include a copy of the Seventh-day Adventist 1872 *Fundamentals*.<sup>1</sup> Sometime later (2005), I obtained an article by him arguing for the Waldenses (or many of them) being Sabbath-keepers. The article was titled *The Waldenses. An Analysis of Insabbatati* (he and I corresponded about a Church history).

In June 2010, he advised me he was withdrawing the article, pending the publication of further research, after rigorous review. His new article was published in 2016 and is available [here](#) (*Decoding Ancient Waldensian Names: New Discoveries*). This shows you how long it can take for scholarly articles to be reviewed and accepted for publication and to finally be published behind a queue of others!

I think you will find the article of great interest – in particular the 16<sup>th</sup> page onward following the sub-heading Waldensian Sabbath-keepers. I think it shows that the Waldensians, much like the terms Adventist or Scythian, is an umbrella term for several groups.

Finally, let me make this point: I have much literature on the Waldensians and from what I could gather, there were Sabbatarians amongst them. It was rather obvious from my readings that many Waldensians observed the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath, but most didn't. We should not force history into our template, but deeply and honestly study the records.

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<sup>1</sup> This included article V: "That the new birth comprises the entire change necessary to fit us for the kingdom of God, and consists of two parts: first, a moral change, wrought by conversion and a Christian life; second, a physical change at the second coming of Christ, whereby, if dead, we are raised incorruptible, and if living, are changed to immortality in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. John 3:3, 5; Luke 20:36."

The old Worldwide Church of God papers by Lester Grabbe *Were the Waldenses a part of God's Church?* (1981) and Lawson Briggs *Did Peter Waldo Keep the Sabbath?* (1974) notwithstanding, some Waldenses did indeed observe the seventh day Sabbath.

In his thesis, Worldwide Church of God minister, Dean Blackwell wrote:

“Another service connected with the original Lord's Supper was the footwashing ordinance of humility recorded in conjunction with this supper in John 13. Of this service, Jesus said, "you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:1415) That the Waldensians took this also literally is borne out by history:

In the seventh century, we have a liturgy of Bobbio, near Genoa, but this directory contains no office for the baptism of children, nor the least hint of pouring or sprinkling; on the contrary, there is a directory for making a Christian of a pagan, before baptism, **and for washing the feet** after it.” (Dean Blackwell, *The Plain Truth about the Waldensians*, Chapter IV, footnote 68: Orchard, Baptist History, p. 297.)  
[emphasis mine]

The details for the book: George H. Orchard, *A Concise History of the Baptists From the Time of Christ Their Founder to the 18th Century* (1838).

Of particular interest is page 259 (located within *Section 11: Baptists in Piedmont*), which discusses the Waldenses/Vaudois or similar groups from that area. He focuses on the Waldenses and their theological connections to earlier dissenting groups. Orchard asserts that the Waldenses maintain a historical continuity with earlier sects such who espoused comparable beliefs regarding church purity, believer's baptism, and the rejection of certain Catholic traditions. He observes that there is no significant doctrinal distinction between the Albigenses and the Waldenses; groups in southern France were frequently categorised as Albigenses but shared similar convictions.

Which particular grouping known as *Waldensians* referred to in Blackwell's thesis appears to be the majority Sunday observers and not Sabbatarians.

## **Tracking Footwashing by Sabbatarians Down the Centuries**

Evidence for seventh-day Sabbatarian groups observing footwashing since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century is very difficult to confirm due to lack of records (i.e., not recorded, lost or destroyed). As far as I know, there is no credible historical evidence in existence for any distinctly seventh-day Sabbatarian groups practicing Passover footwashing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century or immediately thereafter. Not even for the Nazarenes or the heretical Ebionites.

All I can find is the following in Leslie Hardinge's work *The Celtic Church in Britain* in which he demonstrates that this Church was Sabbatarian:

“The history of feet washing as a ceremony of the Christian Church **is tantalizingly elusive**. That pedilavium was practised by the first Christians in response to our Lord's directive, "This do as I have done unto you", is most probable. **There are passing references to this rite in the first centuries. Continued for many years by the Eastern Church** [which was heavily Sabbatarian during the first centuries after Christ], feet washing eventually fell from favour in the West. **But it was carried out long enough to be introduced among the earliest Celtic Christians**. The practice of

washing the feet of those newly baptized was noted by Augustine, but he denied the pedilavium was vital to their baptism." (p. 111) [emphasis mine]

The period he was referring to was prior to the Roman mission under Augustine in A.D. 597 and some time afterward.

"It is possible, however, that this regulation, influenced by Celtic Christians in Ireland, actually had reference to the washing of hands and feet before the Communion service, as is illustrated by the usage in the Stowe Missal. The Celt's adherence to a literal interpretation of the Scriptures seems to have led him to follow the procedure of the upper room exactly. For in that service Christ washed the feet of his disciples before he distributed the bread and wine to his followers." (p. 116)

In my paper [\*Doctrines of the Sabbatarians since the First Century\*](#), I identified occasions where footwashing is mentioned among Sabbatarians prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Dr Peter Chamberlen, M.D. (1601 to 1683) believed in footwashing, full water baptism (ie by immersion) and was anti-Trinity. Chamberlen even wrote to Archbishop Sheldon concerning "the Little Triple Crowned Horn's Change of Times and Lawes," mentioning at the same time, "Escape the Mark of the Beast: & Return to the Keeping of the Lawes of God." (LeRoy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. 4, p. 913).

Another is John Maulden (a Sabbatarian pastor with the Mill Yard Sabbatarian church) who also held to footwashing and an annual Lord's Supper (Passover) (Bryan Ball, *Seventh Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800*, p. 89). He lived sometime during the late 17<sup>th</sup> until his death around 1714.<sup>2</sup>

Corliss Randolph in his *A History of Seventh Day Baptists in West Virginia, Including the Woodbridgetown and Salemville Churches in Pennsylvania and the Shrewsbury Church in New Jersey* records footwashing in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century:

"The following letter written by the Shrewsbury Church to the church at Westerly, Rhode Island, perhaps at the time of the Yearly Meeting, is of interest at this point. It is noteworthy because of certain details of information it contains concerning their settlement at Shrewsbury, their health, fasting, and **the doctrine of feet-washing**. It reads as follows : -  
of feet-washing. It reads as follows : - Shrewsbury, 1750. "The Scattered Remnant of the little flock of Jesus Christ, living at Squan, Squankum, Deal, etc., in Shrewsbury, and at Middletown, all in. the Province of East New Jersey; keeping the Commandments of God, particularly that of his holy Seventh Day Sabbath ; and believing and practising the faith and ordinances of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to our well beloved brethren and sisters of the same faith and practise, the church of Christ in Westerly and places adjacent, in the Colony of Rhode Island in New England, Sendeth Christian Salutation:  
... And now, dear brethren, we shall use the freedom to acquaint you with one thing, and do heartily desire to recommend it to your serious and Christian

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<sup>2</sup> In *What Became of the Church Jesus Built?* pp. 193-94, Lawson Briggs states that many Sabbatarian Baptists observed annual meetings during the Feast of Tabernacles in 1700s from time-to-time, many practiced foot-washing.

consideration, and that is about **the duty of washing one another's feet.**" (pp.14-15) [emphasis mine]

Footnote 1 on page 15 states:

"I. **The practise of feet-washing** was continued by this church after its removal to Virginia, but was probably abandoned at some time during the first half of the nineteenth century. The custom was revived afterwards, however, by other churches in West Virginia. The Middle Island Church adopted it about 1870. The Ritchie Church, and probably the Conings church also, practised it for a short time. But it was not looked upon with favour, and it soon fell into disuse again. An incident which occurred about the time of this **revival of feet-washing**, serves to show another interpretation of the significance of the example of Jesus in washing His disciples' feet. It is as follows: The pastor of one of the New Jersey churches, on one of his visits to West Virginia, was entertained for a short time at the hospitable home of one of the deacons of the New Salem Church. His saintly, and now sainted, hostess asked him for his shoes to polish, and when he hesitated, she said, "I think that is what Jesus meant by his example in washing his disciples' feet, as applied to our conditions of life to-day." She got the shoes to polish. Clarke says: "**Some of these [western Virginia] churches, believe in the washing one another's feet, at appointed times, &c.** [possible reference to the Passover] But as the Sabbath and Baptism are their distinguishing tenets, of which I shall say more in its proper place, if the Lord will, it is needless to be more particular as to their doctrines; for those smaller matters are left to each one's conscience, and do not affect Christian charity or fellowship, in case they do not break one of the least of those Ten solemn Precepts, and teach men so, &c." History of the Sabbatarians, p. 64." [emphasis mine]

A reference to washing of feet can also be found on page 17 of Randolph's book.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Dugger and Clarence Dodd in their book *A True History of the True Religion*, also reference Clark's work regarding footwashing.

## Seventh-day Adventists

In *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, the authors noted that some Millerites practiced footwashing and then the Sabbath began to be of some interest. On pp. 39, 40, some of the Sunday-observing Millerites are mentioned as adopting foot-washing in the mid-1840s, but

"Indeed they soon focused on another test, the Jewish Sabbath, which some Adventists had started to observe as early as 1844 as a result of the activities of a Seventh Day Baptist, Rachel Oakes. She converted a Millerite [Methodist] preacher, Frederick Wheeler, and one of his congregations at a church of the Christian Connection in Washington, New Hampshire ..." (p. 40)

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the Seventh Day Baptists have not included this doctrine in their creed. Robert Vaughn in *Materials Toward a History of Feet Washing Among the Baptists* (2008) explores the rite within missionary and associated Baptist groups, providing various notes on this practice, and is based on primary documents and denominational records. Henry Vedde authored *A Short History of the Baptists* (1891) wherein he presents a scholarly examination of Baptist history, addressing footwashing as a minority practice among different Baptist groups, with references to the Seventh Day Baptists.

The practice is also referred to on pp. 224, 225. And

“The church where all this took place was a Christian Connection church. It was built by the members of the Christian Connection faith in the early 1840s. In 1843, Millerite minister Joshua Goodwin convinced the members of the soon return of Christ. Some evidence points to Christian Connection/Millerite minister Joseph Bates having a role in that church becoming Adventist. That made the Washington, NH, Christian church one of hundreds of New England Christian Connection churches that looked upward for the soon return of Jesus” (Bert Haloviak, *A Heritage of Freedom: The Christian Connection Roots to Seventh-day Adventism*, p. 3).

“A prominent Millerite evangelist, J. B. Cook [John Ball Cook, 1803–1888], became **the chief proponent of foot washing**, which had preceded the Lord’s Supper and which, he argued, Christ had made an obligation as enduring as the communal taking of bread and wine ... The **advocate of foot-washing**, J. B. Cook, avowed his support for Preble and though both soon abandoned seventh-day Sabbatarianism ...” (pp. 19, 27) [emphasis mine]<sup>4</sup>

Following on from the Millerite movement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church instituted footwashing as a compulsory ordinance in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, drawing also from John 13 and early church practices. This practice encountered controversy, including concerns regarding mixed-gender participation before it was formalised. Ellen White supported this ordinance.

Further sources on this include:

- David Trim, “Varieties of Adventists after 1844: Emerging from “fanaticism of every kind” into “the order of heaven””, *Journal of Adventist Archives*, Vol. 1 (2021), pp. 19-20, 27 (refer to footnote below).
- Frederick G. Hoyt, (*Wild Maine Show of February 1845. A Critique of a Regrettably Long Delayed Official Response* (p. 16 references footwashing in 1845 by Millerites).
- Hadid J. Cortez, *An Evaluation of Footwashing as Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Andrews University Honors Thesis).
- Jonathan Butler, “From Millerism to Seventh-Day Adventism: “Boundlessness to Consolidation””, *Church History*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (March 1986), pp. 50-64.
- Ron D. Graybill, “Foot Washing and Fanatics”, *Insight*, Vol. 4 (2 January 1973), pp. 9-13.
- Ronald D. Graybill, “Foot Washing Becomes an Established Practice,” *Review and Herald* Vol.152, No. 22 (29 May 1975), pp. 6–7.
- Ronald D. Graybill, “Foot Washing in Early Adventism,” *Review and Herald*, Vol. 152, No. 21 (22 May 1975), pp. 4–5.
- Timothy L. Dunfield, *The Role of Dissent in the Creation of Seventh-day Adventist Identity* (MA thesis), p. 62.

Footwashing remains a standard Adventist ordinance before quarterly Communion services. I.e., the ordinance is performed four times a year, not annually at the Passover.

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<sup>4</sup> “A prominent Millerite evangelist, J. B. Cook, became the chief proponent of **foot washing**, which had preceded the Lord’s Supper and which, he argued, Christ had made an obligation as enduring as the communal taking of bread and wine.” (David Trim, “Varieties of Adventists after 1844: Emerging from “fanaticism of every kind” into “the order of heaven””, *Journal of Adventist Archives*, Vol. 1 (2021), p. 19) “The advocate of **foot-washing**, J. B. Cook, avowed his support for Preble and though both soon abandoned seventh-day Sabbatarianism ...” (p. 27) [emphasis mine]

## The Church of God and Related Sabbatarians 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The grouping which later took on the name of *Church of God (Seventh Day)* was established in 1858 by Gilbert Cranmer and formalised with the General Conference in 1884, has consistently observed footwashing as a fundamental aspect of its annual Lord's Supper (or Passover) ordinance since its founding. This practice is regarded as the "ordinance of humility" (John 13:1–17) and is carried out by baptised members during the annual memorial held on 14 Nisan. The two ordinances, which include baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper with footwashing, are stated to have been practiced "since our inception in 1858."

From my collected information, below are key historical and doctrinal references.

First of all, we find that in the mid-nineteenth century, an unattached group in Philadelphia continued footwashing. According to John Kiesz's article "The Continuity of the Gospel," *Bible Advocate*, 12 August 1963:

"Most of the brethren observed the Lord's Supper or **Communion and feet-washing at various times**, although a group in Philadelphia began practicing the keeping of the Christian Passover in about 1845, and a brother in Illinois advocated the commemoration of the Lord's death at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib in about 1867. Before the turn of the century, all of our assemblies had come to the conclusion that Communion of the Lord's Supper should be observed annually on the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew year." (p. 25) [emphasis mine]

### From 1858 onward:

After the Church of Christ in Michigan (direct predecessor to the Church of God (Seventh Day)) organised in 1858, quarterly weekend meetings included preaching and concluded with the Lord's Supper and foot washing on Sunday afternoon. Ministers conducted communion "whenever" the occasion called for it (e.g., Gilbert Cranmer after a funeral in northwestern Michigan; Samuel Davison in July 1865 at Fairfield, Iowa).

"The Church of God (Seventh Day) has observed two ordinances since our inception in 1858. We have always baptized new converts by immersion in water, in the name of Jesus. But our observance of the Lord's Supper service evolved from "whenever" to annually. [...] After the Church of Christ in Michigan (former name of the Church of God [Seventh Day]) was organized in 1858, and her congregations grew, she began holding quarterly weekend meetings that rotated among her churches. They began on Friday evening with an opening preaching service, followed by a full day of preaching on Sabbath, and concluded with observing the Lord's Supper **and foot washing** on Sunday afternoon before dismissal." (Robert Coulter, "What's in an Ordinance?", *Bible Advocate online*, 6 September 2018). [emphasis mine]

### 1863-1899:

*The Hope of Israel* was the founding periodical for the Church of God (Seventh Day). By 1872, Samuel Davison wrote an article in *The Hope of Israel* advocating annual observance of the Lord's Supper at the time of Jesus' death (spring/Passover season), consistent with the footwashing already in use. Jacob Brinkerhoff (editor) began publishing annual dates (e.g., 1885 announcement for the 14th of the first month) (Coulter, *ibid*).

The information below is extracted from *History of the Seventh Day Church of God* assembled by Richard Nickels:

“(4) As for the proper time for celebrating the "Lord's Supper," the first definite report of a yearly Passover in Marion was in 1899.

According to Cramer in 1870, the **Marion Church adopted foot washing** and the Lord's Supper at least once in three months. But in April 23, 1867 issue of the Hope of Israel appeared an article by Samuel Counce, Mt. Carroll, HI., contending that the early church, to the time of Constantine, observed the Lord's Supper annually at the beginning of the 14th of Abib, and then we should now show His death until He comes, by also observing it at the beginning of the 14th. Certainly this is a strong indication that some of the Church of God people observed the annual Passover.”

”The April 12, 1881 issue of the Advocate sets forth reasons for observing the Lord's Supper, or Passover, annually at the time of the Jewish Passover. Pro and con articles were printed on the subject, but Passover reports in the spring of that year showed that many brethren had accepted it. A group in Nebraska at Samuel Barackman's kept the **Passover and footwashing** on the evening after the 13th of Nisan, as did R.E. Caviness of Beckwith, Iowa, and a "Brother Davison." The May 24, 1881 issue of the Advocate contains a long article by A. F. Dugger explaining the reasons for annual observance.” (p. 47)

“Passover Question

One of the Issues that was to prove critical in the 1933 division of the Church of God was the date of the Lord's Supper, or Passover.

The April 12, 1881 Hope set forth reasons for observing the ordinance annually at the time of the Passover. Pro and con articles followed, but Passover reports in the spring of 1881 showed that many brethren had accepted it. The April 26, 1881 issue states that **the Passover was kept on the evening after the 13th of Nisan, with footwashing**, at Bro. Samuel Barackman's in Nebraska. Also, R.E. Caviness of Beckwith, Iowa reported observing it, and Bro. S.S. Davison spoke in favor of an annual Passover. The May 24, 1881 issue contained a long article by A. F. Dugger explaining reasons for annual Passover observance.” (ibid) [emphasis mine]

Another important reference is “A Synoptic History of the Churches of God in the Latter Days,” *Facts of Our Faith January 1969*, by Charles Monroe:

“It is also of great interest to observe from the records of the Marion Church of God, that in 1870 they adopted foot-washing and communion to be held each quarter; and the first report of an annual observance was in 1899 ... There is evidence that the Lord's Supper was observed annually long before 1899. **All of this is an indication of how truth gradually came to front in the Church of God**, in spite of the confusion caused by Satan.” (pp. 18-19) [emphasis mine]

#### **c. 1900-1930s:**

Under Andrew Dugger, annual observance (with footwashing) was formalized in doctrinal revisions; Dugger specified the evening beginning of the 14th of Nisan and referred to it as Passover. Debates on exact timing (14th vs 15th) continued for some time and erupted in 1933 but did not question the footwashing practice itself.

According to Nickels' *History of the Seventh Day Church of God*:

“Passover — 14th or 15th of Nisan?

One of the key issues mentioned as the cause of the 1933 Church of God division was the issue of when to observe the Passover. Dugger leaned to observance on the beginning of the 14th, and this was adopted as the official church doctrine. But there was opposition. The Stanberry group (as opposed to the Salem group) leaned toward the 15th date. In a 1937 Bible Advocate of the Stanberry group, Darrell A. Davis wrote an article, "True Christian Observance of the Lord's Supper." He said that the wine should be grape juice, the footwashing before the ordinances, and the hymn should be afterwards, without a closing benediction. The leftover bread should be burnt, and leftover wine poured out. Interestingly enough, the paper listed two "Lord's Supper dates". (ibid)

**1948-1949:**

The Ministerial Council affirmed annual observance of the Passover on 14 Nisan (without condemning other timings); footwashing remained part of it. Although footwashing is not mentioned in relation to this episode works such as Robert Coulter's *The Journey: A History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* (pp. 345-46, 377-78, nevertheless it is implied because it was not raised as an issue and the practice from the previous century continued.

**1996 onward:**

There have been a number of items released by the Church of God (Seventh Day) on the subject:

From the *Statement of Faith Church of God (Seventh Day)*, Second Edition, 2013 (Statement 6. "Christian Ordinances"):

“... Lord's Supper, a memorial to Christ's atoning death. Believers commemorate Christ's death by eating the bread of communion and drinking from its cup, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, thus demonstrating fellowship with our Savior until He returns. It is accompanied by the washing of feet. We observe this Supper annually in the season it was instituted and are charitable toward those who observe it at other times.” (p. 5)

This doctrine also appears in the *Church Manual for the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). Bylaws of the International Ministerial Congress (Section 9. Church Ordinances)*, 2017:

“We believe Christ prescribed two ordinances for the church which confirm faith in Him. 1) Baptism by immersion symbolizes the believer's death to sin and new birth in Christ. 2) Lord's Supper as an annual memorial of Christ's death symbolizes the believer's continued union with the Savior. Footwashing as an act of humility accompanies the Lord's Supper.” (p. 9)

Another publication throwing light on the history of the observance is: Israel Steinmetz, “Foot Washing: Empty Ritual or Full Symbol?”, *Bible Advocate*, 15 April 2016.

## **Worldwide Church of God**

From the Church of God (Seventh Day) and associated groups, Herbert W Armstrong learned fundamental doctrines such as 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath observance and basic Christian living principles (repentance, faith, fruits of the spirit, beatitudes etc). In addition the following (which includes footwashing) were also learned from that Church (the list below is what I can garner from Mr Armstrong's statements and beliefs):

- Annihilation of the wicked
- Basic Christian living and way of life
- Church eras
- Clean & unclean meats
- Divorce & Remarriage
- **Footwashing at Passover**
- Gospel of the Kingdom of God
- Healing
- Holy spirit is a force, not a personage (something adopted later in his ministry)
- Law of God and Ten Commandments
- Laying on of hands
- Man does not have an immortal soul
- Millennium on earth
- New birth/born again culminates in the resurrection (during the 1920s and 1930s the Church of God generally taught this)
- Passover on 14 Abib
- Seven resurrections of the Roman Empire
- The Christian reward is not heaven
- Tithing
- Water baptism
- Wednesday Crucifixion-Saturday Resurrection

NB: the Church of God (Seventh Day) does not necessarily hold to all of the above today. Or they may have made amendments to them.

All of the above were continued during the work of Mr Armstrong, including footwashing from his days in the Church of God (Seventh Day). Note: he pastored the congregations known as the *Churches of God in Oregon*. In late 1933 Mr Armstrong left the Church of God (Seventh Day) based at Stanberry, Missouri and joined the breakaway group set up by Andrew Dugger also known as the Church of God (Seventh Day), but based at Salem, West Virginia.

In January 1934 the Churches of God in Oregon voted to follow Mr Armstrong and associate with Dugger's group:

"The following is a report of the meeting.

At a meeting in the home of S. A. Oberg this morning the following motion was carried

Moved by S. A. Oberg that the Church of God in the State of Or. Accept the Constitution of the organisation with headquarters at Salem West Virginia in its entire 40 points. Seconded by Brother Hobbs. Unanimously adopted or carried." (*G Hobbs letter to Herbert Armstrong*, 31 Jan 1934, p. 1).

All of the letter (3 pages) concerns this decision.

It was only in 1946 that the church registered as the Radio Church of God – prior to that it was an unincorporated association with the name of Churches of God in Oregon.

I cannot find where this doctrine is covered in early Churches of God in Oregon or Radio Church of God *Bulletins* or *Coworker Letters* at this time; however I have the following:

**Booklet, Calendars, letter:**

- Herbert W. Armstrong, *How often should we partake of THE LORD'S SUPPER?* pp. 8-9.
- *God's Sacred Calendar*, (1960, 1970, 1974, 1986), p. 2.
- Herbert W. Armstrong (1956), *Passover In Your Home* letter.

**Good News articles:**

- Stephen K. Hart (1980). "Footwashing: Only a Lesson in Humility?" *Good News*, March, pp. 10-11. This possibly the longest and most detailed doctrinal article on the topic in Worldwide Church of God literature.
- Richard H. Sedliacik (1980). "MINISTUDY: God's Great Master Plan - Part 1", *Good News*, March, pp. 25-26.
- Richard H. Sedliacik (1979). "MINISTUDY: Qualifying to Rule", *Good News*, September, pp. 21-22.
- Albert J. Portune (1971), "Are YOU Ready To Take The PASSOVER?", *Good News*, January-April, pp. 8-11.

**Ambassador College Correspondence Course:**

- *Lesson 25 – PASSOVER: The Beginning of God's Master Plan*, 1986, pp. 7-8.

**Youth Lessons:**

- *Level K Spring Special Feast Lesson* (1983).
- *Level 3 Special Feast Lesson* (1983).
- *Level 5 Special Feast Lesson* (1983).
- *Level 8 - Lesson10* (1986).

**Worldwide News:**

- George M. Kackos (1986), "Self-examination and humility must be part of foot washing", *Worldwide News*, 24 March, p. 6.

**Pastor-General's Report:**

- "From Ministerial Services", *Pastor-General's Report*, 22 February 1985, p. 1:

"In the weeks immediately preceding the Passover, a few sermonettes and some sermons that clearly cover the meaning of the footwashing service, the bread and the wine should be assigned. God intends that we carefully and thoroughly remind His people about these important subjects at this time every year. We must never allow ourselves to feel that these topics have already been covered enough, or that it isn't necessary to "rehash every- thing again this year."

**Final Comments**

I trust that these notes have been helpful in some way and demonstrates the long legacy of footwashing within the Sabbatarian and Church of God communities. While we cannot prove it from

*Notes on the History of Footwashing Among the Sabbatharians*

history, it would appear that this practice likely continued down the centuries since Christ Himself commenced this aspect of the New Testament Passover service.

Most non-Sabbatarian Christians do not practice it today and those that do, continue to do so in a fashion and on days which are not strictly Biblical.

May this command of Christ never be forgotten or diminished

“If I then, 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 just as I have done to you.” (John 13:14-15, ESV)

## Appendix. Footwashing in the Old and New Testament, the Graeco Roman World, the Early Church, and the Liturgy

By Carmine Pernini, 14 April 2014

<http://www.zionlutherannj.net/footwashing-in-the-old-and-new-testament-the-graeco-roman-world-the-early-church-and-the-liturgy-2/>

Emphasis mine throughout the article.

### Footwashing in the Old Testament and Extra-Biblical Sources

Footwashing occurs frequently in the Old Testament. Generally, there are at least three situations where footwashing is observed: cultic settings, domestic settings for hygiene and comfort, and domestic settings devoted to hospitality. In the Torah, priests are required to wash their hands and feet before entering the holy place of the tabernacle to offer sacrifice on the altar. Moses receives these commands in Exodus 30:17-21. Exodus 40:30-32 describes these instructions. 1 Kings 7:38 and 2 Chronicles 4:6 mention ten basins(40 baths) in which the priests were to wash. Also, the high priest is expected to wash his hands and feet on the Day of Atonement(Lev. 16:24). John Christopher Thomas says, "This cleansing from bodily uncleanness was a symbol of putting away of the filth of sin; the washing of the body therefore was a symbol of spiritual cleansing, without which no one can draw near to God, and least of all those who were to perform the duties of reconciliation."<sup>[1]</sup> The hands and feet would be washed regularly because of their relatively higher exposure to being "contaminated." Philo says, "One should not enter with unwashed feet on the pavement of the temple of God."<sup>[2]</sup> He goes on to say, "Washing the hands and feet is a symbol of a blameless life, of years of cleanliness employed in laudable actions, and in straight traveling, not on the rough road or more properly pathless waste of vice, but on the smooth high road through virtue's land. Let him who shall be purified with water, bethink him that the mirrors were the material of this vessel, to the end that himself may behold his own mind as in a mirror."<sup>[3]</sup> Thomas says, "The order for the High Priest and priests to wash themselves is made more emphatic by the observation that death will follow any performance of the priestly functions without cultic purity, as the 'holy' works destruction on the 'unholy.'"<sup>[4]</sup> Footwashing has a lengthy history associated with cultic rituals and purity in the Old Testament.

Coloe says, "Footwashing had particular significance in the synagogue, where it recalled God's apparition to Abraham under the oaks of Mamre."<sup>[5]</sup> Genesis 18:4 says, "Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree." Abraham's role in washing the feet of the divine messenger is brought out in the Testament of Abraham, "Then Abraham went forward and washed the feet of the commender in chief, Michael. Abraham's heart was moved and he wept over the stranger."<sup>[6]</sup> In his act of personally washing the feet of his guests, Abraham is established in the Jewish tradition as the great model of hospitality.<sup>[7]</sup> Coloe says, "A common greeting in ancient Israel is to offer water to a guest and to invite him to wash his feet(Gen. 18:4, 19:2, 24:32, 43:24; Judges 19:21, 1 Sam. 25:41, 2 Sam 11:8), and to rest(Gen.18:4), spend the night(Gen.19:2), or accept food(Gen. 24:32-33; Judges 19:21)."<sup>[8]</sup>

Footwashing is also associated with servitude in the Old Testament. Psalm 60:8 says, "Moab is my wash basin, upon Edom I toss my sandal..." Thomas says, "The reference to a wash pot or basin...in connection with casting off the sandal clearly indicates their common use for the purpose of washing feet. It is clear from the reference that Moab is to be so reduced that he becomes the wash basin which is carried by a slave to pour water over his master's feet."<sup>[9]</sup> This leads Thomas to conclude that there is a loose connection between sandals and servitude. Psalm 58:10 says, "The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked." Here, blood will be used to wash the feet of the righteous.

In the Old Testament it is common to associate footwashing with the priestly admission into the tabernacle and temple. Footwashing also prepared you for a variety of activities, like a meal for example. Footwashing was also used for personal hygiene and comfort. Thomas reports, "Footwashing was so common that the lack of adequate preparation could be expressed by the phrase 'with unwashed feet.'"<sup>[10]</sup>

**Also, footwashing is generally the responsibility of servants. A host or hostess can offer the hospitable act, but it is ordinarily carried out by slaves.<sup>[11]</sup> Those who receive footwashing are almost always the social superiors of those who render the service. Lastly, and very rarely, in cases of deep love or devotion a host might wash the feet of another.**

#### Graeco-Roman World

In the Graeco-Roman World, footwashing also has a ritual component. Footwashing is associated with entering holy sites. Thomas says, "Homer and Strabo imply that footwashing normally precedes entrance into a sacred place, whether oracle or temple."<sup>[12]</sup> Thomas also points out that Favius Pictor, a Roman historian in the third century BCE, preserves testimony that at some point certain Roman priests participated in ritual footwashing.<sup>[13]</sup> Footwashing was also very common as a form of personal hygiene in Graeco-Roman Society. Thomas says, "It appears that footwashing was so common in domestic contexts for hygienic purposes that it gave rise to a traditional saying which described the commencement of a course of action without due preparation as rushing into matters with unwashed feet."<sup>[14]</sup> This usage is similar to the Old Testament saying listed above and implies that footwashing was done regularly.

**Footwashing was also a sign of hospitality. One of the primary forms of footwashing was as a sign of welcome.** According to Thomas, the best documented and most frequent accounts of footwashing are found in contexts where the washing precedes a meal or banquet.<sup>[15]</sup> Similar to the Old Testament, footwashing was almost exclusively the duty of slaves or servants. Not only do servants draw the water, wash the feet, and dispose of the water, but it appears that a slave could not refuse to render this service, no matter how old he or she might be. Thomas says, "Footwashing could be used as a synonym for slavery. To wash another's feet symbolized the subjugation of one person to another. Those who received footwashing from another were social superiors of those who performed the task."<sup>[16]</sup> In short, footwashing was widespread in Graeco-Roman culture with varied meanings.

#### Footwashing in the New Testament

Footwashing is also represented in Luke and John (similar stories with the anointing of the Jesus' head in Matthew and Mark) as well as in 1 Timothy. In Luke 7:36-50 a sinful woman enters the house of a Pharisee and anoints Jesus' feet. In Luke 7:44 Jesus reminds his host that he was not offered water for his feet. This suggests that footwashing was a normal practice at or before a meal. Simon seems to think that the woman's sinful status disqualifies her from washing Jesus' feet. The fact that she uses her tears instead of water could show her willingness to honor Jesus even though she has no water to use to wash his feet. It also points to her "love" (Luke 7:47). Mark 14:3-9 tells the story in a different way. In Mark, the woman uses "costly ointment of nard" which is poured on Jesus' head, not his feet. Jesus says the woman has anointed him in preparation for his burial. Matthew 26:6-13 has the anointing of Jesus' head and the act is done to anoint Jesus for his burial as well. Both Matthew and Mark say what she has done "will be told in remembrance of her (which it is as we read it today in perpetuity)."

This brings us to John which has two stories of footwashing. The first comes in John 12:2-8. The family meal shortly before the Passover in John 12:1, which is given an unusually precise day in relation to the Passover by the evangelist (the anointing meal occurred on the *first day of the week*; there we have the reunion of (the raised) Lazarus<sup>[17]</sup> with his sisters and with Jesus in the context of a communal meal. Elser says, "The first day of the week has significance because it will also be the day on which Jesus is discovered to have been raised, exactly one week later: 'Now on the first day of the week.'"<sup>[18]</sup> Here, the unnamed woman in Mark, Matthew, and Luke is given a name, Mary. The "alabaster jar of very costly ointment (of nard in Mark)" is given a quantity, one pound! This is extravagant and is approximately a year's pay worth of nard. Mary anoints Jesus' feet for the day of his burial. C.H. Dodd says, "The theme of the discourse here is clear and simple. It treats throughout of death and resurrection: the seed that decays to give birth to a crop (Jn. 12:24); the principle of dying to live (12:25); Christ's self devotion; His death as judgement on the world."<sup>[19]</sup> Before Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, we are told the authorities were going to arrest Jesus whenever he appeared. Dodd says, "When he (Jesus) arrives at Bethany, we are emphatically reminded that this is the place where Jesus gave life to the dead Lazarus at the risk of his own life and that Lazarus himself was a there, a living

witness."<sup>[20]</sup> Lazarus is a living witness to the truth of life out of death. In a sense, the raising of Lazarus from the dead is a confirmation of Jesus' claim to be the resurrection and the life, and at the same time an anticipation of what will take place on the last day.

Jesus also identifies Mary, Martha, and Lazarus as friends whom he loves. Jesus calls the disciples friends later in John's gospel. In the Mediterranean world, 'love' had the underlying meaning of attachment to a group: family, village, ethnic group or fictive kin group. Malina succinctly states, "Since in first-century Mediterranean society there was no term for an internal state that did not entail a corresponding external action, love always meant doing something that revealed one's attachment – that is, actions supporting the well-being of the persons to whom one is attached."<sup>[21]</sup> In John's Gospel God reveals God's abiding loyalty to Israel by sending his only Son so that those who believe in him might have endless life. Jesus reveals his abiding loyalty by saving his 'friends' and giving his life for them. In John 15:13 Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Sacrifice for friends is the greatest sign of true friendship, and as indicated above, Jesus was willing to lay down his life not only for Lazarus, but for all. Against this backdrop, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with her hair and extremely costly nard for Jesus' burial. Dodd says, "It seems clear that for John's purpose the significant point of the story comes in 12:7, with its reference to the burial of Jesus. The exegesis of the verse presents difficulties, and the text itself is not altogether beyond question; but it seems that the intention is to associate the incident with the thought of burial, in preparation for the saying about the buried seed in 12:24. Lazarus is seated beside Jesus, whom he 'called out of the tomb(12:17),' he is anointed as one would anoint a corpse. If in 11:53 Jesus is designated for death, here he is designated for burial."<sup>[22]</sup> **Mary washes the feet of her teacher. As I have demonstrated above, this was a normal practice which fits into the idea that those of lower social status serve those with greater social status.** It is an abnormal act in that it is extravagant(the pound of nard). J. Ramsey Michaels says, "John seems to know of Luke's version and points out that Martha typically served the supper, and Mary 'anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. But, John also knows Mark's details of the ointment being 'pure nard,' of its value at 300 denarii, and the statements about the poor including a shortened pronouncement from the mouth of Jesus."<sup>[23]</sup>

1 Timothy 5:9-10 references footwashing. Many have thought that this suggests that footwashing was carried out in the early church(see below). These verses lay out certain prerequisites which a widow must meet in order to qualify for support from the church.<sup>[24]</sup> Footwashing is listed among other acts that were considered good works for widows. Thomas notes, "The mention of footwashing in a list of duties is a rarity. This unique placement of footwashing in a list of qualifications for a specific position or office implies that there is something particular about the rite."<sup>[25]</sup> **This has lead some to believe that the command to wash feet should be taken literally and this is attested to in the literature of the early church.**

#### Footwashing in the Early Church

Tertullian is one of the first writers to acknowledge that footwashing was practiced as part of Christian worship. He said, "I must recognize Christ, both as he reclines on a couch, and when he presents a basin for the feet of his Disciples, and when he pours water into it from a 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 others these articles, but challenging that this be judged in the light of the distinction between things agreeable and things apposed to reason because the promiscuous employment of them is deceptive, concealing the corruption of the creature, by which it has been made subject to vanity."<sup>[26]</sup> It seems as though Tertullian is making a reference to John 13 and the linen towel Jesus wore as it relates to the mystery religion associated with Osiris. He also references the continued use of the basin, water, towel, and footwashing. Thomas says, "Footwashing was important for the community since Tertullian is willing to risk similarity with the Osiris cult in order to defend the practice."<sup>[27]</sup>

Athanasius said, "This bishop shall eat often with the priests in the Church, that he may see their behavior, whether they do eat in quiet and in the fear of God. And he shall stand there and serve them; and if they be weak, he shall wash their feet with his own hands. And if he is not able to do this, he shall cause the archpriest or him that is after him to wash their feet. Suffer not the commandment of the Savior to depart from you, for all this shall ye be answerable, that they likewise may see the lowliness of the Savior in

you.”<sup>[28]</sup> He said, “That they likewise may see the lowliness of the Savior in you.” This is profound in that it gets at the sacramental aspect of footwashing. It is not necessarily the action of washing the feet that makes clean, but rather, the participation in the humble act of the Lord and Teacher.

Chrysostom similarly urges Christians to imitate the actions of Jesus. He said, “Let us wash one another’s feet” He said. “Those of slaves, too?” And what great thing is it, even if we do wash the feet of slaves? For He Himself was LORD by nature, while we were slaves, yet he did not beg off from doing even this... Yet what shall we then say, we who have received the example of such great forbearance, but do not imitate it even slightly, and who, on the contrary, adopt the opposite attitude: both magnifying ourselves unduly and not rendering to others what we ought? For God made us debtors to one another – after He Himself had begun this process – and debtors in regard to a smaller amount. He Himself, to be sure, was Lord, whereas if we perform an act of humility we do it to our fellow slaves. Accordingly, He made an indirect reference to this very thing, by saying: “If therefore, I the Lord and Master,” and again: “So you also.” Indeed, it would have followed logically for us to say: “How much rather we slaves,” and He left this conclusion to the conscience of His hearers.”<sup>[29]</sup> Ambrose also captures the sacramental aspect of footwashing when he says, “I, then wish also myself to wash the feet of my brethren, I wish to fulfill the commandment of my Lord, I will not be ashamed in myself, nor disdain what himself did first.”<sup>[30]</sup> Augustine writes, “And wherever such is not the practice among the saints, what they do not with the hand they do in heart... But it is far better, and beyond all dispute more accordant with the truth, that it should also be done with the hands; nor should the Christian think it beneath him to do what was done by Christ. For when the body is bent at a brother’s feet, the feeling of such humility is either awakened in the heart itself, or is strengthened if already present.”<sup>[31]</sup> The act of kneeling and washing another’s feet is participation in the action of Christ that does not require ordination or even ‘membership.’ The very act itself produces the humility and orientation that Christ longed for from his friends/disciples which the early church attests to.

#### Footwashing in John 13 – A Brief History of Interpretation

There are many different interpretations of the meaning of footwashing in John 13. One of the most prevalent seems to be footwashing as an example of humility. Footwashing, as I have noted above, is typically the job of slaves and servants. Jesus lays aside his clothes and girds himself with a towel, which would be reminiscent of something a slave might wear. This act of humility fits well with Jesus command to the disciples to perform the task for one another.

Another interpretation is that footwashing is a symbol for the Eucharist. The primary reason for this is the pericope’s setting. Jesus’ action of footwashing in John takes the place of the institution of Eucharist which is recorded in the Synoptics. Thomas says, “It is often assumed that the author of the Fourth Gospel is drawing attention to a connection between the two stories.”<sup>[32]</sup> Jesus’ command to continue the practice of footwashing is similar to the command to repeat the Eucharist.

Still, another view not entirely unrelated to the Eucharist is footwashing as a symbol of Baptism.<sup>[33]</sup> The use of water and the focus on cleansing in footwashing helps many to see the connection to baptism. Most arguments for the symbol of baptism focus on the word *louō* in 13:1. The verb *louō* implies the idea of a complete bath which is similar to baptism. Thomas argues that *louō* is often a synonym for Baptism in the New Testament.<sup>[34]</sup>

Footwashing is also tied to the forgiveness of sin. Some scholars argue that there is cleansing/forgiveness of sin apart from baptism that is needed and tie this view to the removal of post-baptismal sin. Footwashing is also seen, due in part to the context in John, as preparation for the Eucharist. Some view footwashing as an argument against baptism and ritual purification. This is due in part to the footwashing apparently replacing baptism or the Eucharist in John. Thomas says, “This view is grounded in Peter’s proposal that his hands and head be washed in addition to the feet. Jesus’ response makes explicit that ritual washings of the kind Peter proposes are unnecessary; only the footwashing is needed.”<sup>[35]</sup>

Others view footwashing as a sacrament separate from both baptism and the eucharist. Often, it is seen as a sacrament linked to penance and the removal of post-baptismal sin. It has also been linked to the ordination rite and the preparation for disciples to serve at the Lord’s table.

Lastly, footwashing is seen as a soteriological sign that is held together with Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection. Dodd says, "Christ, the eternal Son of man, who descended from heaven to ascend to heaven again, to whom all authority is given, descends to the lowest place of service. The washing of the feet, therefore, is a 'sign' of the incarnation of the Son of God, consummated by His self oblation in death."<sup>[36]</sup>

So, is footwashing an example of humility? Is it a symbol of the eucharist? A symbol of baptism? Of another sacrament or a replacement of both the eucharist and baptism? Is footwashing a sign of the forgiveness of sin, or a soteriological sign of Jesus' death and resurrection? Clearly, footwashing is a richly symbolic act with multivalent meanings.

#### Footwashing in the Liturgy

Footwashing, as it is practiced today is usually on Maundy Thursday. The service begins with the confession and forgiveness sins with the option of individual forgiveness and the laying on of hands. This is followed by the Apostolic Greeting, then the prayer of the day which highlights either Jesus' betrayal or links footwashing with service. Then, the Word is read. The first reading is from Exodus 12 which tells the story of the Passover. The Epistle reading is from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 which gives us Paul's account of Jesus' words over the bread and wine. The Gospel Acclamation is "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you." The Gospel reading is John 13:1-17, 31b-35 which is Jesus washing the disciples' feet and the new commandment to love one another as Jesus loved you. After the sermon, there is footwashing which is framed by words of love and service. Then there are prayers of intercession, the peace, and the meal. Lastly, there is the stripping of the altar and the departure in silence.

Footwashing has a lengthy history in both biblical and extra-biblical sources and culture. Footwashing is represented in the history of God's chosen people throughout the Old Testament. All of the meanings of footwashing detailed above are present when Jesus washes the disciples feet. That is, footwashing is full of these other meanings. There is the cultic setting where priests wash their hands and feet before entering the holy place of the tabernacle to offer sacrifice upon the altar and the priests washing their hands and feet on the day of the atonement. The idea that the 'holy' kills the 'unholy' if the 'unholy' is not purified. Christ, in a sense, the temple, was anointed by Mary who evokes a weeping Abraham from the Testament of Abraham whose heart was moved by the stranger, the stranger(Jesus) whose identity is revealed in the raising of Lazarus. This could be seen as juxtaposed with Jesus cleansing the temple in the beginning of John with the anointing of Jesus, the temple, by Mary in chapter 12. This imagery also draws on Abraham's reputation for being hospitable. Similarly, though distant, is the image Philo brought up when he said, "One should not enter with unwashed feet on the pavement of the temple of God." Here, Jesus, one with the Father, anointed by Mary, the living temple, has his feet anointed, the God who walks with us in this Garden(Genesis 2), today, to wash our feet, to prepare us for the feast in the shadow of the cross and resurrection, imploring us to share a part of himself. And there is more, footwashing occurs most often in Graeco-Roman society in the context of preparing for a banquet. On Maundy Thursday, Christ himself is preparing us for the feast that he has prepared for us for all. Ordinarily, the preparatory footwashing would be carried out by a servant or a slave, but there is nothing ordinary about today with Mary's pound of pure nard which fills up the temple with its sweet aroma. Today, the slave, Jesus in his linen cloth, humbles himself after he knows that "the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God and was going to God" uses those same "hands" that had "all things" to wash the feet of those he loves. His first act after acquiring all things was to take the form of a slave/servant(Philippians 2) and prepare the disciples for the banquet.

In the Old Testament, footwashing was used to help guests feel comfort, but in John's gospel Peter becomes uncomfortable with the act that formerly brought comfort. Mary uses expensive oil(symbolic of death) to wash Jesus' feet, but Jesus uses water(symbolic of life), the symbol of baptism, to cleanse the disciples in love and service. It is truly the bath that makes us dirty with all of our neighbor's needs.<sup>[37]</sup> All of these images explode onto the act of footwashing on Maundy Thursday amidst the backdrop of confession and forgiveness, the Exodus story's recounting of the Passover, Paul's recollection of Jesus' words at the Lord's Supper, the prayers of intercession, the Eucharist, the stripping of the altar, and the chilling silence of Good Friday and "My God, my God..." Augustine said, "For when the body is bent at a brother's feet, the feeling of such humility is either awakened in the heart itself, or is strengthened if already present."

Martin Luther once said, "When you read in the gospel or hear it read that Jesus Christ comes here or goes there, that he heals the sick and raises the dead and forgives sins, you are to understand that he is coming here, that he is forgiving you and raising you from the dead, and healing you." This is what each Gospel book intends. In fact, this is what footwashing does. Christ, who 'had all' from the Father in his hands, became a servant, and invited all of us to have a share with him (Jn. 13:8). Jesus says he is "the Lord and Teacher (Jn. 13:14)" and he washes the feet of the disciples, effectively becoming a slave on account of love. He then says, "Servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them (13:16)." Jesus takes the form of a slave and washes the feet of others effectively making them his master, but Jesus asks them to do this to each other (Maundy = command in Latin) which effectively makes the disciples the slaves of all if the feast is kept. Christ's first act of freedom is to make him a slave to all. Consequently, Christ then asks his disciples to be slaves of all as well, today, to your neighbor, to the least of these.

Footwashing is primarily observed on Maundy Thursday. The image of footwashing is transformed by its use on this particular night in this particular context. Footwashing is different than other symbols in that the act of footwashing, or receiving footwashing, gives the actor direct access into one of the primary messages of the act, humility and service.

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