

The Paraclete as Broker of Truth in Context

By Doug Matacio

This article builds on “the dynamic nature of present truth” (Knight 2000:17-28) that Seventh-day Adventists have valued since the movement began, and applies it to mission advance. James White, in beginning the publishing work of the church, quoted 2 Pet 1:12 (KJV), “WHEREFORE, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the PRESENT TRUTH” (1849:1). Since “contextualization,” that is, *truth in time and place*¹ goes nicely with the Adventist concept of “present truth,” Seventh-day Adventists may unite to embrace it as an important means for completing



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their mission of preaching the three angels’ messages of Rev 14:6-12 (a contextualized form of the gospel, specifically designed for an end-time audience) throughout the world.

What is the work of the Holy Spirit in contextualization for world mission? This article focuses only on the Paraclete passages in the Gospel of John, which suggest that the Spirit is a broker of truth—providing access to truth from Jesus that enables believers to complete God’s mission in fresh contexts of time and place.

The Initial Promise: A Broker of Truth (John 14:15-17)

“(15) If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (16) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper (*paraklētos*), that he may be with you forever; (17) that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold him or know him, but you know him because he abides with you, and will be in you” (NASB).

The four Paraclete (Greek: “one called to be beside,” cf. Mounce 2003:432; Louw and Nida 1989:423, 424) passages can be understood in light of the

purpose of John's Gospel, which is to convince the second generation of believers, those who had not seen Jesus in person, that they too could believe (Minear 1981:247-264; Paulien 1995:19-23). So, this Gospel itself is a contextualization designed to encourage a particular group. "Only when the word is related to the urgent needs of a particular generation does the wider relevance of that word emerge" (Minear 1981:264).

Tricia Gates Brown researched the term, *paraklētos*, in ancient Greek literature (Demosthenes, Heraclitus, Bion Borysthenes, Dionysius Halicarnassus, and Philo) and concluded that it was a broker or mediator who

Paraclete will help believers of any generation or society to "contextualize" the truth of Jesus' commands by living with them and being in them as they obediently apply those commands in new and specific contexts.

The Essence of Contextualization: A Brokerage of Teaching and Remembering Truth (John 14:26)

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (NASB).

In this next Paraclete passage the Gospel writer presents the essence of contextualization.

We see the Paraclete emerging as a broker of truth in different temporal contexts.

stood in the gap between the patron, who possessed some sort of benefit, and the client, who needed access to the patron's benefit (2003:180-181). A "broker of truth," in the context of this paper is a mediator who provides access to divine truth, not otherwise obtainable (The idea of "legal advocate" is almost entirely missing from the Greek literature antedating John's gospel. 2003:170-182).

John 14:15-17 reveals the connection between obedience, the Paraclete, and truth. The

The key expression, *panta*, "all things," links the activity to all contexts of time or place.

In the first place, the Spirit of truth will teach all things, implying that there are some things the disciples do not yet know, that they will need to know in the future. This understanding is confirmed later, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12; NASB). The word *now* implies they *will* be able to bear them in a different temporal context. "All things [all truth

in all contexts] that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you” (John 16:15; NASB). The promise is that the Paraclete will disclose these new truths at a future time when the disciples will be able to bear them or when they are needed. We see the Paraclete emerging as a broker of truth in different temporal contexts.

Second, the Paraclete in a ministry of remembrance, will broker access to truth in the memories of second and future generation disciples, reminding them of the *panta*, “all things,” that Jesus had taught the first generation. Contextualization in the Paraclete passages is born in this juxtaposition of the two “all things.” The *panta* taught in different contexts later will not contradict the *panta* that Jesus had already taught them—for example, Paul’s lifting of circumcision for Gentiles and pioneer Adventist understanding of the sanctuary).

Charles Van Engen, discussing theologizing in context concludes:

“Clearly we are dependent on the Holy Spirit here. During his farewell discourse, Jesus emphasized the didactic role of the ‘Spirit of truth.’ The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said to you’ (John 14:17 NIV). Again there is clear unity of the truth; it is the truth of Jesus Christ, and it will not be a *neos* truth. It will be a *kainos* truth, which is both continuous with previous revelation and discontinu-

ous in its radical contextualization” (1989:91).

When Van Engen compares *neos* truth and *kainos* truth he is comparing two Greek words for “new”, the former emphasizing radical discontinuity and the latter, much more common in the New Testament, meaning “continuity in the midst of change” (1989:85-86). In the process of contextualization the Paraclete brokers *kainos* truth.

The Purpose of Contextualization: Witnessing to Brokered Truth (John 15:26-27)

“(26) When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, (27) and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (NASB).

Before Jesus can come again (John 14:1-3) the disciples have their work cut out for them: participation in the mission of God. This missionary context of the Paraclete passages is set in John 14:12, “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father” (NASB). Köstenberger comments, “the disciples’ performance of ‘greater works’ may be taken to refer to the gap Jesus’ followers would fill between his ascension and return. Thus the work of Jesus . . . foreshadowed

in his 'signs,' would continue to be carried out through the disciples" (1998:171).

In John 15:26-27 mission takes the form of "bearing witness" (NASB) of Jesus or "testifying about" him (NIV). A *paraklētos* in ancient Greece, while not primarily a forensic figure, would sometimes testify in court on behalf of a friend (see John 15:13; T. Brown 2003:218-219).

To whom are the Paraclete and the disciples being called to witness? If they are both to witness to the world, how do we understand John 14:17b, which says that the world can-

disciples' witness about Jesus.²

Jesus needs the Paraclete to witness on his behalf since he himself is returning to the Father. He will be present in the world only through the Spirit and his disciples. Does the text give us any clues as to how these two witnesses, the Paraclete and the church, work together? I have suggested above that they both witness to the world (also Carson 1979:563). Secondly, the Paraclete, again called "the Spirit of truth" here, also witnesses to the disciples concerning the truth about Jesus that they must take to the world. Verse 26 underlines

The Paraclete and the body of disciples, work together to bring Jesus' "other sheep" into the fold when they hear truth in context.

not receive the Spirit of truth "because it does not see Him or know Him?" First, the context of 14:18-25 indicates that a hostile world is in focus here. Second, the answer can be seen in light of John 10:16, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." The world itself does not understand or receive the Paraclete, but Jesus' "other sheep" out in the world do hear the testimony, and they respond positively to the Spirit's and the

fact that this "Helper" is being sent "to you," the disciples.

The Paraclete is involved in a two-fold ministry on behalf of the disciples: brokering truth for the disciples which enables their mission of witnessing to the world, and acting as a helper or broker witnessing directly before them and after them in the world about Jesus. Thus the two witnesses, the Paraclete and the body of disciples, work together to bring Jesus' "other sheep" into the fold when they hear truth in context.

**The Work of
Contextualization:
Brokering Truth by Proving the
World Wrong (John 16:7-13)**

(7) Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate [or Helper, margin] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (8) And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: (9) about sin, because they do not believe in me; (10) about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; (11) about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. (12) I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (13) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come (NRSV).

This final passage may be divided into three parts. Verse 7 follows the pattern of the first three passages by including the encouraging promise that the Paraclete will be sent. Verses 8-11 present the work of the Paraclete as contextualizer: showing the world to be wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Finally, verses 12-13 remind us that the Paraclete's main work is to give Jesus' followers access to truth for mission accomplishment (John 14:12) *in whatever contexts that might arise in the future*.

Much scholarly discussion has centered on the meaning

of *elegksei ton kosmon peri*, translated above (v. 8) as "prove the world wrong about." On the meaning of *elegksei* two groups of scholars have emerged that parallel the two meanings of *convict* in Webster's dictionary (1985:287): "To find or prove to be guilty" and "to convince of error or sinfulness." So, to translate "convict" (NIV, NASB, NKJV) is ambiguous; it is one thing for the Paraclete to prove to the disciples that the world is wrong or guilty (R. Brown 1966-70, Vol. II:705), but it is quite another thing to convince the world to admit its own sinfulness (Carson 1979:574-575). Louw and Nida's lexicon defines *elegchō*: "to state that someone has done wrong with the implication that there is adequate proof of such wrongdoing, to rebuke, to reproach" (1989:436).

Two factors indicate the primary meaning here should be "convict in the sense of proving to the disciples that the world is wrong." First, John 16:7 *twice* repeats that the Paraclete is being sent "to you [the disciples]." Verse 8 is thus basically saying, "When he comes *to you* (according to the verse 7 context), he will prove *the world* to be wrong. Second, John 14:17 has already stated that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth "because it does not see him or know him." It is not therefore "the world," that is convinced of its sinfulness, when the Paraclete comes—but Jesus' "other sheep" who will come out of the world and into the fold

when they hear the voice of Jesus through the witness of the Spirit and the disciples (see an earlier instance in John 12:20-21; RSV). Köstenberger supports this understanding that “the world” refers to those who oppose God and God’s people in John (1998:187-188).³

What is the Paraclete’s actual work in John 16:8-11? First, by way of summary, the general context of the Paraclete passages in the farewell discourse is Jesus encouraging his disciples in light of the fact that he is going away and they have a mission

them not to be deceived by false versions of truth in the various societies and religions of the world. It prevents syncretism and other abuses of the biblical principle of the contextualization of truth.

Second, the Paraclete’s direct witness in the world was hinted at in John 15:26, where Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would testify in response to the hostile world mentioned in 15:18-25. The fact that 15:27 said that the disciples would also testify implied that the testimony of the Spirit in the world would

Contextualization requires that disciples listen to the Spirit of truth as they separate the innocent assumptions, values, social customs, and artifacts of their society from the three tragic miscalculations that will eventually doom it.

to accomplish in a hostile world (John 14-16). The immediate context of 16:8 is the twice repeated promise in verse 7 that Jesus will send the Paraclete to you (the disciples). So, it follows that verses 8-11 teach that the Paraclete will broker to Jesus’ disciples the truth that the world is wrong; it will expose to the disciples the false teachings of the world with regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment. This Paracletian ministry helps

be direct and distinct from that of the disciples. So, we can understand the Paraclete’s coming *to the disciples* in 16:7-11 to also refer to his testimony in the world as another way of aiding the disciples. He not only proves to them that the world is wrong, but he witnesses directly in the world, a broker “sealing the deal,” while powerfully supporting the disciples’ witness. In this way he persuades Jesus’ “other sheep” to come out of the world

(Jesus also chose his original sheep “out of the world” cf. John 15:19b).

Third, the Paraclete will prove to the disciples as they witness that the world is wrong about *only* three things, important as they are: sin, righteousness, and judgment. The world of Japan, for example, is not necessarily wrong about eating with chopsticks, removing shoes in the house, or soaking in a soapless hot *ofuro* (bath). The world of Indonesia is not necessarily wrong about shaking hands profusely instead of bowing. The world of Islam is not necessarily wrong about posture in prayer. The

nocent assumptions, values, social customs, and artifacts of their society from the three tragic miscalculations that will eventually doom it. Disciples in every society, taught and guided by the Paraclete, will be able to show how the people of “their world” are right about many things, but wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Fourth, the Paraclete points out that the world is wrong about sin because it does not believe in Jesus. He helps disciples to realize that even though the world defines sin as committing some kind of heinous crime, the gospel’s definition of sin is

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people of the United States are not necessarily wrong in saying “hi;” nor are the people of Canada wrong in saying, “eh” as a tag question at the end of statements. It is not the work of the Paraclete to prove that the world is wrong about these kinds of cultural details. Yet, all the societies in the Johannine concept of the world are wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Contextualization, therefore, requires that disciples listen to the Spirit of truth as they separate the in-

consciously refusing to believe in Jesus. No matter how ethical humans may be, they are sinners and subject to eternal death when they refuse to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The other important factor is that “the world” (including every society) does not believe Jesus when he tells them that certain cultural customs and behaviors it condones are actually sins against God. No contextualized understanding of truth can ignore these factors, and the Paraclete helps the disciples to point

them out whenever the gospel is preached.

Fifth, the Paraclete brokers the truth that no set of cultural values, as good as they might be, can qualify as salvific righteousness. What the world calls *righteousness* is as “filthy rags” (Isa 64:6; KJV) from the perspective of the gospel. So, righteousness here needs to be understood in an ironic sense; it is false righteousness (Carson 1979:558-60) like Paul’s “righteousness of my own derived from the law” (Phil 3:9; NASB). Only Christ’s sinless life received by faith qualifies as righteousness in the Christian economy. The Paraclete steps forward to broker this truth because Jesus, having gone to the Father, is not on earth to do so.

Sixth, the Paraclete brokers the truth that the world’s concept of judgment is false. “By putting Jesus to death, the world will believe it has succeeded in condemning him. According to the world’s mistaken wisdom, justice will have been served” (T. Brown 2003:231). The world will also judge Jesus’ disciples as they witness, in many cases persecuting them in some way or even condemning them to death. But the Paraclete offers the truth that the world’s judgment is false because the ruler of the world has himself already been judged. This last statement gives Jesus’ witnesses authority over evil spirits and other forms of the demonic.

Seventh, in the conclusion of the Paraclete passages, the

Gospel writer reiterates the work of the Paraclete as “the Spirit of truth in guiding Jesus’ disciples into “all the truth” (verses 12-13). A missiological understanding could paraphrase, “He will guide you into the truth as it can be applied in all contexts of the missionary enterprise.” Context is implied in the reference to the future in the last phrase of verse 13, “And he will disclose to you what is *to come*.” Some truth will be reserved for future contexts.

Eighth, verse 13 further suggests that the Paraclete’s work of contextualization will overlap that of a prophet. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy, and two prophetic roles are mentioned here: one who speaks on God’s behalf and one who can disclose the future. Historically, the work of a prophet is to speak God’s message in the context of a particular time and place. M. E. Boring has suggested the Johannine community fostered the gift of prophecy as seen in the Fourth Gospel’s inclination to view Jesus, the first Paraclete, as a prophet. “Every verb,” Boring suggests, “describing the ministry of the Paraclete is directly related to his speech function” (1978:113-123).

“He teaches ‘all things,’ things which the historical Jesus did not say and could not have said. The revelations from Christian prophets are thus not simply a repetition of the tradition; they are an expansion of it. New words of Jesus are coined for new situations, words that are genuinely new, and yet are

in line with the tradition and can to some extent be tested by it" (Boring 1978:118).

An example from the Seventh-day Adventist perspective is the gift of prophecy in the ministry of Ellen G. White. The Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, it seems is also the Spirit of prophecy. The Adventist Church may come to see the Ellen White writings as primarily an attempt to contextualize truth and make it relevant to the 19th and early 20th centuries. For example White's advocacy of vegetarian-

ism should be at the forefront in developing the theology and practice of contextualization.

Conclusion

This study of the Paraclete passages in John shows that the Paraclete is sent to "broker" or provide access to truth for the benefit of Jesus' disciples and the world in which they are called to work. The Spirit of truth delivers *present, contextualized* truth to meet the needs of workers as they participate with God in his mission: to communicate

Present truth is ambiguous in that the word, present, may apply either to time or place. In the Paraclete passages, where John speaks of now and future, the primary focus is on time. . . . Paul's primary focus was contextualizing truth in contexts of space.

ism fits the context of conditions in the meat industry in the 19th century. Certainly Jesus himself did not advocate vegetarianism, though the principle of caring for one's body is scriptural. Now the church sees itself as carrying on the prophetic tradition of Elijah and John the Baptist through its unique message (Provonsha 1993:37-60). The link between the role of the prophet and contextualization of truth means that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which claims the gift of prophecy,

the gospel of Jesus Christ in a culturally diverse world. And the Paraclete supports this mission by working jointly with the disciples, empowering their witness with a direct witness to present truth in the world. In this way Jesus' "other sheep," wherever they may be in contexts of time and/or place, may hear his voice and follow him.

Present truth is ambiguous in that the word, *present*, may apply either to time or place. I have found, however, that in

the Paraclete passages, where John speaks of now and future, the primary focus is on time. A recent study in the biblical theology of contextualization has already suggested that Paul's primary focus was contextualizing truth in contexts of space: societies, ethnic groups, and geographical places (Flemming 2005:56-233).

In the introductory Paraclete passage (John 14:15-17) Jesus makes a *promise* to give another Paraclete to the disciples that he may be with them forever. The focus on the Paraclete's ministry to the disciples themselves begins in the first two verses and contrasts with verse 17a where the world does not receive, see, or know him. The passage ends by describing the projected intimacy between this "Helper" and the disciples: they will know him because he abides with them and is in them.

In the second passage (John 14:26) the Paraclete is sent to do two specific things: he will teach all things in the future, and he will help the disciples to remember everything that Jesus taught them in the past. The Paraclete's ministry of contextualization includes teaching new insights appropriate to future contexts, but all these new things will be learned even as Jesus' past teachings are continually remembered. The new teachings, which the disciples cannot bear *now* but can bear in future contexts (John 16:12), will not contradict the old, nor will they

cause the disciples to forget the foundation Jesus laid. The harmony of what must be learned in the future and the truths Jesus has already taught—is the *essence* of contextualization in the Paraclete passages.

The third passage (John 15:26-27) suggests the *purpose* of contextualization. The Spirit will offer truth in season in order to make witness possible in a hostile world (John 15:18-25). Here we see the context of place as well as that of time. The Paraclete, called the Spirit of truth here, bears witness directly and is by the disciples' side enabling them to effectively bear witness to truth themselves. Jesus' promise—that the disciples would do greater works [of mission] than he did (John 14:12)—will be fulfilled in this way.

In the last passage (John 16:7-13) we can see the nitty-gritty *work* of contextualization in the ministry of the Paraclete. How does he actually do it? He does it by the process of proving to the disciples and to Jesus' "other sheep" (John 10:16) in the world that the world is dead wrong about three important things. It fails to realize that its most deadly sin is to refuse to believe in Jesus; it values its own righteous works for salvation rather than the righteousness of Christ; and it continues to pass judgment on Christ, failing to see the irony that at Christ's crucifixion, it was actually his adversary that was condemned. At the same time the disciples

	TRUTH FOUNDATIONS	TRUTH IN NEW CONTEXTS
FOR BUILDING TRUTH	<p style="text-align: center;">← Remembrance</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Bring to Remembrance the Truth that Jesus Had Taught</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ ↓ ↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Teaching & Guidance →</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Teach All Things (Future) and Will Guide into All Truth (Future)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
FOR WITNESSING TO TRUTH	<p style="text-align: center;">Conviction</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Prove the World Wrong to Disciples and “Other Sheep” about Sin, Righteousness, Judgment</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Assumption</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Will Assume the World Right about Other Values and Customs (What is Not Wrong Is Right)</p>

learn that in their witness the world need not be censured for many values that are of lesser consequence. In this passage the Spirit of truth guides the disciples step by step into more and more truth as new temporal contexts necessitate it.

I conclude with the presentation of a model of the Paraclete’s ministry of contextualization in the Gospel of John (see above).

In the model the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, helps Jesus’ disciples to remember the truth that was taught by Jesus even as he teaches them new things in new contexts of time and place, and guides them into all the truth that they will need in these future contexts. The Spirit provides the necessary “foundation” and the new “structures”

that will compromise neither. The Paraclete is building truth that makes witness in the world possible in new contexts.

The two cells in the left column show the foundations of truth established by Jesus himself; he taught truth to his disciples, and he established the criteria for distinguishing truth: the definition of sin, the standard for righteousness, and with his death and resurrection—the basis for judgment in all possible contexts.

The two cells on the right show how the Paraclete will teach truth which the disciples “could not bear” at the time of Jesus’ farewell discourse. Jesus’ disciples throughout history would encounter new contexts of time and place that would demand

continued teaching and guidance. The gospel would be taken into new frontiers where ethnic groups new to Christianity would need to distinguish between wrong and right.

The two top cells show how the Paraclete is called to a ministry of helping disciples of all ages and geographical locations to build truth internally using the foundation of Christ's teachings and the new truth structures that the disciples could not originally "bear," which he will now teach in context. The two bottom cells show how the Spirit of truth will enable the disciples to reach out with this contextualized truth and witness to the world, making possible the gathering of Jesus' "other sheep" into the fold.

As a result of this study I have developed a new definition of contextualization which comes out of John's Paraclete passages. *Contextualization is a process by which the Paraclete will provide present truth in time and place—based on the remembrance of truth already taught by Jesus and the Spirit's teaching/guiding ministry of leading both witnessing disciples and Christ's "other sheep" in the world into all truth.*

Seventh-day Adventists as a prophetic movement called to preach the three angels' messages of Rev 14 as "present truth" and supported by a gift of prophecy should not only embrace the concept of contextualization. They should specialize in developing a theology of contextualiza-

tion for missiological theory and practice as part of their unique contribution to the building up of the Body of Christ.

Notes

¹I am beginning with the following "textbook" definition of contextualization, but working toward one adjusted through insights gained in this study of the Paraclete passages in John's gospel. "Contextualization attempts to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture" (Whiteman 1997:2).

²Many scholars suggest that when Jesus mentions "other sheep" in John 10:16, he is referring to the Gentiles who were outside the Jewish fold. My application of this text to our contemporary context sees the fold as the church and the other sheep as those in the world that join the church when they hear the gospel being preached. "Spiritual Israel," for example, is seen in Gal 3:29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise." See also Rev 11:2 where the term, *ethnos*, "Gentiles" or "nations," may be understood in a symbolic, spiritual sense.

³Carson (1979:558) argues that *elegchō* should be taken to mean “convince of,” that the Paraclete convinces the world of its sin, but offers no explanation for how this meaning can fit the context of John’s Gospel, where “the world” is seen as always opposing God and his people (1979:558). While “the world” as defined by John is never convinced of its sin, pseudo-righteousness, or mistaken views on the judgment (against Carson), Jesus’ “other sheep,” in the world recognize the voice of Jesus in the witnesses of the Paraclete and the disciples, and follow him into the fold.

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