

THE CONJUGAL EXPERIENCE OF JAMES AND ELLEN WHITE: MEANINGS BUILT BY THE COUPLE

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The story of James White (1821–1881) and Ellen Gould White (1827–1915), co-founders and leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, begins in the nineteenth century in the United States.¹ They were married on 30 August 1846, when James was twenty-five and Ellen eighteen.² The Whites

¹Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: James White, 1851); idem, *Spiritual Gifts. My Christian Experience, Views and Labors in Connection with the Rise and Progress of the Third Angel's Message*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1860), 2:iii–iv, 7–300; James White, *Life Incidents: In Connection with the Great Advent Movement as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1868; repr., Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003); E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church with a Biographical Sketch of the Author*, 9 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1885), 1:9–112; J. White and E. G. White, *Life Sketches: Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors of Elder James White, and His Wife Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1880; rev. ed., Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1888). The most relevant secondary sources on James and Ellen White, are Virgil E. Robinson, *James White* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976); Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 6 vols. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1981–1986); Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2003).

This article is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive, but to provide an analysis from empirical data obtained from documents produced mainly by the couple and to consider their experiences in light of the cultural-historical context in which they lived. The findings are the result of the research proposal, thus, the method can be followed by another researcher in order to check the data and confirm the results. However, based on the set of investigated documents, the authors believe that there is nothing that denies the humanity and fragility of both, emphasizes their shortcomings, or indicates Ellen and James's perfection. It is only the picture that the data analysis presents of both during a certain critical period of their lives without pretending to establish any value judgment. Still, the authors acknowledge the limitations of time and space of a broader and more refined analysis in this complex issue, the conjugality of the Whites, a theme that is open to further investigation. Therefore, the object of research is still open to other methods that can identify how and if, for example, James's crisis would relate to Ellen White (aspect not identified in available data) and to what extent it affected the dynamics of the couple, but this is a topic for other research.

²J. White and E. G. White, *Life Sketches* (1880), 126, 238. Ellen's young age at marriage was below the average for the middle nineteenth century in America; young women were delaying marriage to a mean age of 24.4 in 1839 (James M. Volo and Dorothy Denneen Volo, *Family Life in Nineteenth-century America* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007], 33).

were members of the great Adventist religious movement led by Baptist preacher William Miller. The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of this movement and was formally organized in 1863.³ The growing denomination emerged in a country of continental dimensions, and new church members were spread over that vast territory. A strong sense of evangelistic duty and mission drove James, Ellen, and other pioneers to travel extensively with the aim of expanding and consolidating the new church.⁴ James became a writer, preacher, administrator, and tireless traveler who announced the Advent message; Ellen would become the most prolific writer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the denomination would recognize her as a messenger chosen by God to lead and guide the church through the gift of prophecy.⁵ As they reconsidered their personal beliefs and sought a biblical basis for their faith, James and Ellen White wrote constantly to guide, indoctrinate, motivate, and unify church members.⁶

Relevance of this Research

The study of the Whites' marriage is relevant because marriage and family issues are part of the Adventist message, contained in the church's core beliefs, and disseminated through its books, magazine articles, and television programs. The church maintains the Department of Family Ministries, which focuses on marriage and is present from the local church level to the highest denominational level, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.⁷ The teachings of Ellen White are an important part of the Adventist Christian family model, and James and Ellen played key roles in the formation of the theological mentality of the Adventist Church. Their teachings and testimony have a great impact on Adventist Church members and their practices, including marital ones. Therefore, one important question to be

³George R. Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 13–205; Andrew Gordon Mustard, "James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 1844–1881" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1987), 117–162.

⁴P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977; repr., Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 165–292.

⁵For a general understanding of Ellen G. White's ministry and its acceptance among Adventists, see *Witness of the Pioneers Concerning the Spirit of Prophecy: A Facsimile Reprint of Periodical and Pamphlet Articles Written by the Contemporaries of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: The Ellen G. White Estate, 1961); Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998); Theodore N. Levterov, "The Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of Ellen G. White's Prophetic Gift, 1844–1889," (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2011); Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2014).

⁶Much of their work is available today in digital format from the Ellen G. White Estate: <http://ellenwhite.org>.

⁷Adventist Family Ministries, "Home," <http://family.adventist.org>.

raised in this discussion is whether the teachings of the church, particularly Ellen White's teachings about marriage, are consistent with the Whites' own marital experiences. In this sense, the subject is relevant for Adventists and those interested in the church's history.

Previous studies on the Whites' family life that were examined within the limits of this investigation did not take a contextualized psychological approach, but were limited to theological-historical interpretation.⁸ Therefore, we believe that a psychological analysis can contribute to a new perspective on the topic. In this study we will question the meanings of the Whites' marriage, built by the couple themselves, taken mainly from documents produced by them.

The Concept of Marriage or Conjugal Union

Marriage has been described in the literature as an interactional process of building a common reality that constitutes the opposite of individuality, intended to last a lifetime.⁹ This relationship is built through verbal exchanges, aiming at a shared history; a change in the agenda of one spouse inevitably affects the other.¹⁰

Kurt Lewin describes the marital relationship as a group situation of two people, and the most demanding of all situations of this type.¹¹ Several reasons are cited by Lewin: marriage demands more profound and lasting dedication than any other human group and, moreover, covers all aspects of life without admitting interference in its dynamics. Thus, marriage is a human grouping with extremely low tolerance to external interventions and involves desire and the expectation of reciprocal access and intimate exposure.

Lewin also draws attention to the fact that a marital group, like any other, is not the mere sum of its parts, because it has its own structure, goals, and dynamics, even when in relationship with other groups, which requires individual adjustment to the groups' demands. The essence of a group is not the similarity or the difference between its members, but their interdependence, which can vary from a firm cohesion to a fragile relationship. In this sense, the

⁸Ronald D. Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1983); A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vols. 1–3; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*; George R. Knight, *Meeting Ellen White: A Fresh Look at Her Life, Writings, and Major Themes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1996); idem, *Walking with Ellen White: The Human Interest Story* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1999); Robinson, *James White*; Wheeler, *James White*.

⁹John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), passim.

¹⁰Terezinha Féres-Carneiro and Orestes Diniz-Neto, "De Onde Viemos? Uma Revisão Histórico Conceitual da Psicoterapia de Casal," *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa* 24.4 (2008): 487–496.

¹¹Kurt Lewin, "The Background of Conflict in Marriage," in *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers in Group Dynamics*, ed. Gertrude Weiss Lewin (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 84–102. The following discussion is based on these pages by Lewin.

differences or similarities are only important to the extent that they meet the group's needs as a whole and those of its members in particular.

Still, according to Lewin, the group supports the individuals within it, and their position and security depend on how accepted they feel by the group. Any change in the group will affect its members, and any change in one of its members affects the group. Thus, if an individual's participation is not well established in the group, the group may become unstable. This applies most acutely to conjugal groups.

For Lewin, participation in a group complies with principles of necessity for both the group and the individual. Participation in a group requires a variable measure of submission to group needs, but there must be enough freedom for each person to meet their own needs as well. If those needs are not met, tension will arise, and the person will be unhappy. As this unhappiness becomes more intense, it may cause the person to leave the group or want to destroy it.

From the point of view of meeting individual and group needs, Lewin points out that adjustment to a group depends on three factors: (1) the character of the group, (2) the individual's character and individual characteristics, including the amount of freedom they need, and (3) the position the individual occupies in the group. The reconciliation of these factors depends on whether the group's leadership is autocratic or democratic, with different results for the group and its members. The adoption of autocratic leadership tends to produce tense, insecure individuals without initiative; discourage creativity; and, among other negative effects, according to Lewin, produce much greater tension and lead members of the group to apathy or aggression.

Democratic leadership, on the other hand, generally leads to greater interaction; stimulates creativity, initiative, and advancement of members; eases tensions; and produces safety in the group. It provides an open channel between the leader and the led to speak frankly, both in symbolic exchanges of everyday life and in conflict resolution. Democratic relations are directly linked to the atmosphere, another important element in the group, on top of the ability to meet needs. This atmosphere, along with the level of freedom, may be a decisive factor in the resolution of problems and conflicts, especially in marital relations.

Thus, causes of tension can be described as (1) the degree of need or need satisfaction, (2) the amount of freedom, (3) external barriers that prevent withdrawing from the environment when there is tension to avoid more suffering and conflict, and (4) conflict between the goals of group members or refusal to consider others' point of view. Several other issues related to the functioning of a marital group have the potential to generate conflict: (1) unmet expectations of one spouse in relation to the other, (2) an accentuated and continuous state of lack of attention or hypersatiation, and (3) a difference in the couple's sexual expectations. These issues can be balanced by placing a high priority on maintaining the marriage. Another important element that can generate or minimize conflict is the meaning that marriage has for its members. Depending on this meaning, marriage can facilitate the achievement of goals or become a barrier to them.

Another element that may produce conflict is nesting of groups. Other groups, like church, work, or family, can compete with or become more important than the marriage itself, leading to jealousy. This feeling can be produced by the presence of a third person who interferes in the conjugal relationship, but can also be due to other groups occupying the attention of either spouse.

Theoretical Aspects

Two theoreticians were used in this research. First, for analysis of meanings, the proposal of Lev Vygotsky was adopted—namely that the meaning present in the unit of analysis constitutes testable empirical data to access the individual human being and their relations, since the individual and the collectivity are a social construction. In this analysis of the Whites' marriage and couple relationship, the theoretical reference sees, at the psychological level, the individual and society as mutually constituted within the historical process.¹² Thus, as an appropriate theoretical framework, this study adopts the cultural-historical perspective developed by Vygotsky and his collaborators.¹³

Second, the concept of family as a group from Lewin, one of the pioneers of social psychology, was adopted in this work, as mentioned above. His

¹²The theoretical adoption of the human individual and/or collective as a social construction in this text serves only as a research method, considering the imperfect world in which we live. The human being and the institution of marriage from the point of view of the adopted theory, are psychologically and socially under constant movement and cultural-historical mutation, which can also be attested in the biblical account, but unfortunately, not always towards the ideal indicated in Scriptures. Sociology and psychology do not necessarily need to contradict the Scriptures.

¹³The cultural-historical psychological theory was developed by the Russian psychologists Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Alexander Romanovich Luria (1902–1977). Vygotsky argued that the capacity for signification through the ability of making meaning by the use of signs (words) is the distinctive quality of the human beings. Consciousness (or self-consciousness), according to Vygotsky, is constituted historically and culturally in a dialectic process mediated by the meaning present in the sign; therefore, “thinking and speech are the key to understanding the nature of human consciousness,” thus “the word is the most direct manifestation of the historical nature of human consciousness” (L. S. Vygotsky, “Thinking and Speech,” in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, vol. 1 of *Problems of General Psychology*, eds. R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton [New York: Plenum Press, 1987], 285). For a comprehensive exposition of this theory see Anton Yasnitsky, René van der Veer, and Michel Ferrari, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Cultural-Historical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); see also James V. Wertsch, *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), and Ronald Miller, *Vygotsky in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). This research, however, does not endorse all ideological assumptions culturally accepted by Vygotsky. The cultural-historical theory can grasp only the human reality after sin and cannot replace revelation or explain the operation of the Holy Spirit. For a better understanding of Vygotsky and his contribution see: René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), particularly chapter 16, “Criticisms.”

theoretical proposal has been interpreted erroneously as static. Further studies indicated that a more accurate reading of Lewin revealed the presence of a dynamic interaction between individuals. However, the dynamic relationships of the group, similar to proposals in various systemic aspects, were expanded after the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela Morris in what was called the bioecological theory of human development.¹⁴

According to Vygotsky,¹⁵ throughout individual existence, the use of signs and their meanings provides a relational situation between humans through speech, in its various manifestations, which plays a central role in social relations. In this theoretical framework, the emergence of conscious thought follows the human construction of a social and semiotic world that becomes a specific part of the human environment. This world is appropriated and internalized, and gradually transforms the primary psyche into conscious thought. In this sense, the constitution of the mind is the internalization of social meanings; hence individual and society are inextricably linked, and the mind and the social world accessible through socially shared meanings by speech.¹⁶

Therefore, the meaning of the word appears as a “unit of analysis of the relationship historically made between thought and language.”¹⁷ However, the multiple meanings depend on the situations, positions, and ways of participation of the subjects in the relationship. That is, when it comes to behavior and experience, the marital meanings present in the speeches and the cultural context of the Whites and their practices, from the available documents, constitute material for analysis, referenced in theory, which can provide a scientific view of the meanings present in the consciousness of the individual that are constructed and collectively shared through these practices.

In this sense, representing consciousness, the speeches and practices with their meanings and the social context cannot be underestimated, because they point to the individual’s own constitution. Therefore, through the meanings

¹⁴See Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela Morris, “The Ecology of Developmental Processes,” in *Handbook of Child Psychology*, vol. 1 of *Theoretical Models of Human Development*, ed. William Damon and Richard M. Lerner, 5th ed. (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1998), 993–1028; or idem, “The Bioecological Model of Human Development,” in *ibid.*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2006), 793–828.

¹⁵Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), *passim*. Scientific theories are subject to improvements, particularly in the humanities, but in general, some resistance to Vygotsky, particularly in the West, is often due to his critics being unaware of his theoretical proposal. Although there are discussions on this and other psychological theories, the cultural-historical theory is accepted and used in researches around the world having their findings been successfully replicated in many studies, and theoretical analysis of different authors.

¹⁶Demóstenes Neves da Silva, “Significações de Pais e Professores sobre a Relação Família-Escola: As Armadilhas de um (des)encontro” (PhD diss., Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2014), 59–68.

¹⁷João Paulo P. Barros et. al, “O Conceito de ‘Sentido’ in Vygotsky: Considerações Epistemológicas e suas Implicações para a Investigação Psicológica,” *Psicologia & Sociedade* 21.2 (May/August 2009): 174–181. Translated by the authors.

present in the documents that contain their speeches, one can analyze the Whites' experiences of their marital relationship and their daily practices.

Methodology

The conception of the human being as the subject of thought and one that creates meaning and sense in social relations, as indicated in the theoretical purpose of this study, points to a qualitative methodological approach that values contextual and interpretative aspects of the research.

This work is a qualitative case study based on the analysis of documents written by the Whites, especially, but not exclusively, private correspondence, available at the Ellen G. White Estate website. The main documents on which the analysis is based are those related to their marriage and its crises, particularly from 1874 to 1876. That period was marked by James's poor health from the effects of the strokes he suffered in previous years, and fatigue on the part of Ellen White as James's caregiver.¹⁸

The letters used in this research show clearly expressed ideas by James and Ellen, with no indications of inability to write, despite James's illness. The content of this material expresses the symbolic universe related to their marital life. It shows the type of relationship they lived and how the couple handled their stresses and subsequent reconciliatory actions.

Furthermore, this set of documents was produced by the couple without the expectation of publication, being of a private nature, and thus does not present evidence of speech that is merely laudatory or aimed at providing social satisfaction. Thus, the material offers the opportunity to identify the constituent meanings of awareness of those involved and their practices, and

¹⁸Part of the letters written by the Whites during that period and a brief historical-contextual analysis appears in an appendix in E. G. White, *Daughters of God: Messages Especially for Women* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 260–273; and A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:424–445. James suffered his first stroke on 16 August 1865 ([Uriah Smith], "Sickness of Bro. White," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 26.12 [1865]: 96 [Future references to the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* will be abbreviated with *RH*]; J. White, "My Condition," *RH* 26.23 [1865]: 180; E. G. White, *Life Sketches*, 168–169; idem, "Our Late Experience," *RH* 27.12 [1866]: 89; William C. White, "Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White," *RH* 114.1 [1937]: 10–12; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White* 2:118–119). In 1873 (April and May), he suffered two other strokes (Robinson, *James White*, 241; cf. J. W[hite], "Permanency of the Cause," *RH* 42.4 [1873]: 29). Some state that the 1873 strokes were the fourth and fifth ones (cf. Jerry Moon and Denis Kaiser, "For Jesus and Scripture: The Life of Ellen G. White," *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 48). In 1879, James stated that since he had begun preaching the gospel, his life had "been a life of toil, care, perplexity, and sickness much of the time." He also added that three times his "nervous system" had "been shocked . . . with paralysis, and three times the arm that traces these lines has fallen, for a time to be raised and moved only by the other." According to him, all of these strokes "usually occurred after severe mental strain" (J. W[hite], "Grow Old Gracefully," *RH* 53.20 [1879]: 156). In 1881, in the last days of his life, he suffered another stroke; according to Dr. Kellogg, had he survived this one, "his mind would [have been] permanently enfeebled" (Robinson, *James White*, 297, 299).

is useful to identify and analyze the meanings constructed in the private and marital life of the Whites.

The document analysis in this study uses the method proposed by Laurence Bardin, called content analysis, based on the Lewin family concept. Content analysis can be “defined as an operation or set of operations aimed to represent the contents of a document under a different form of the original in order to facilitate, at a later state, its consultation and referral.”¹⁹

In qualitative research, document analysis aims to provide a convenient form and represent this information (raw data) with maximum relevance, and to form a preliminary database (representation of raw data) for further analysis of the content. This is done by manipulating the messages contained in the documents to highlight thematic or frequent indicators that suggest meanings different from the raw data, according to the research objective.²⁰

The documents used in this study constitute a revealing record of individual practices as well as collective and cultural practices of the time that were significant for individuals involved. In this investigation, the chosen documents were consulted in an effort to understand the marital relationship, corroborated by the historical context of the time, as described by other researchers of the subject.

After finding and examining the data, the units of analysis were organized in thematic blocks constituting broader categories. These categories were then analyzed from the perspective of cultural-historical psychology, taking as the main reference the concept of marriage as a group situation, proposed by Lewin.²¹

To understand the marital relationship of the Whites in the context of the nineteenth century, we have adopted the following objectives: (1) to describe and analyze the meanings and practices of the marital relationship of the Whites present in the documents they produced, and (2) to identify consistencies or inconsistencies between speech and practice with regard to their marriage.

The limitations of this research are linked to conditions of time and space that prevent a more detailed analysis of both the data used in this research and the other documents available, but not utilized in the study. However, in addition to the results already presented, this work’s methodology and theoretical framework are useful for the investigation of the objectives as key themes to be expanded on later.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The examination of the documents allowed the construction of data sets that, according to the research objectives, were organized into three broad, thematic blocks or categories. To address the specificities of these thematic blocks, sub-themes were developed for each of them. The general themes are:

¹⁹Laurence Bardin, *L'Analyse de Contenu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977), 45; idem, *Análise de Conteúdo* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 1977), 45.

²⁰Ibid., passim.

²¹Lewin, “Conflict in Marriage,” 84–102.

(1) the dominant meaning of the Whites' marriage, (2) barriers in the relationship, and (3) the promoting factors or potential promoters of the relationship. We will continue now to the analysis of each thematic block with its subtopics.

The Dominant Meaning of the Whites' Marriage

In this thematic block we highlighted two sub-themes: (1) dealing with what the marriage of the Whites was not and (2) the marriage of James and Ellen as a union whose dominant meaning was compliance with the mission.

The Lack of Romantic Love

The Victorian era in which James and Ellen lived was characterized by the typical morality of the time, which expected a woman to live a life of obedience to her husband, emphasizing private and public modesty, purity, and piety.²² In the United States during the pre-Civil War era, what was known to its detractors as the "cult of domesticity" or "cult of true womanhood" prevailed among the Anglo-American upper and middle class, which contrasted the home with the world and idealized it as a shelter built by a wife and mother for her husband and children; the most valuable thing for these women was the education of their children to be valuable citizens.²³ However, at that time, the rules were different when it came to private and intimate life.

According to Lystra's in-depth study of Victorian behavior, it was acknowledged that there was more openness and honesty in private behavior in the United States during the nineteenth century. Thus, the widespread notion of that century as a time when communication during courtship and marriage was conducted in a distant and formal style is at odds with the content of the letters and the recommendations in love manuals of the time.²⁴

The introductions of love letters in the United States in the nineteenth century, as described by Lystra, indicated the level of intimacy between the correspondents. The "pet names" or nicknames used were clear emblems of the privileged relationship, stated in the initial greetings and farewells of letters and cards.²⁵ Introductory phrases such as "Dear Pet Baby Wife," "My Darling Precious Wife," "My Darling Chikey," "My Little Darling Wife," "Dear Dovey," and "My Dear Darling Chick" were common. The conclusions used "Your No-No," "Your Pussy," and "Devotedly Your Own," among other equally flirtatious phrases. And, although the language of emotions was sometimes conventional, the images drawn presented details of the emotional

²²Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²³Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151–174; republished in idem, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21–41; cf. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), passim.

²⁴Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 12–27.

²⁵Ibid.

condition of both parties, especially the women. Therefore, according to the author, love letters of the time were not formal, but very expressive and free in showing affection, from “business to sex.”²⁶ Also, the choice of a spouse²⁷ based on love was already part of the conditions for marriage around 1830.²⁸

Thus, the absence of elaborate expressions of love and affection in the private letters between James and Ellen indicates a marriage without the romantic features of their time. In the letters analyzed, for example, the introduction phrase Ellen uses for her spouse is “Dear husband,” and for Lucinda Hall, her assistant, “Dear sister Lucinda,”²⁹ and “Dear Lucinda.”³⁰

In the conclusions of the letters from Ellen to James, the expressions are “Yours in love,”³¹ and “In much love to yourself and Lucinda, I remain, Yours affectionately.”³² “Your Ellen,” “In Love,” and “In much love I remain, Your Ellen” are also used by Ellen,³³ but these expressions do not point to a relationship centered in romance. First, because the letters lack loving content centered on marital intimate affections: the predominant themes in the letters

²⁶Ibid., 19.

²⁷Though parental guidance was important, the freedom in the choosing of a partner as the basis to form a new family is visible at that time (Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1980], 8–19; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* [New York: Basic Books, 1993], 109–119).

²⁸Ellen White corroborates this thought. A few years later she said: “Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life, both in this world, and in the world to come. A sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that God must choose for him. We are not to please ourselves, for Christ pleased not himself. I would not be understood to mean that any one is to marry one whom he does not love. This would be sin. But fancy and the emotional nature must not be allowed to lead on to ruin” (E. G. White, “Marrying and Giving in Marriage,” *RH*, 65.39 [1888]: 610; idem, *The Adventist Home: Counsels to Seventh-day Adventist Families as Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* [Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1952], 43; cf. idem to Dear Brother Albert, 23 September 1886 [Letter 23, 1886], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1).

²⁹E.g. E. G. White to Dear Sister Lucinda, 6 April 1876 (Letter 58, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem to Dear Sister Lucinda, 8 April 1876 (Letter 59, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

³⁰E.g. idem to Dear Lucinda, 20 April 1876 (Letter 60, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem to Dear Lucinda, 27 April 1876 (Letter 61, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

³¹E.g. idem to Dear Husband, 16 May 1876 (Letter 27, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

³²Idem to Dear Husband, 4 April 1876 (Letter 3, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

³³See for example the letters quoted in A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:434, 437, 439.

analyzed are work, mission, duty, camp meetings, publishers, problems in the brotherhood, and religious themes. Second, Ellen used similar expressions to address assistants, fellow church members, friends, and family, such as “Much love to yourself and my husband,” “In love to all the Family,” “Love to yourself and Mary Chase and all friends,” “Your wife, whom I love and respect in the Lord,” and “I love you, and I want to see you in a position where you can best serve the Master,”³⁴ among others.

Despite expressions of affection and mutual care, especially on the part of Ellen, the private letters lack the central theme of mutual passion, even in a time of great emotional need, during the crisis of James’s disease. In this situation, one would expect the various letters to contain expressions of support, intimacy, and conjugal love, but, in general, the expressions in the letters of Ellen and James could also be used for a close relative like a child, father, or mother.

Some reasons can be inferred for the formality, or lack of romantic affection, in this private correspondence between spouses. First, it could be suggested that this situation was due to the critical stage of James’s disease. However, no warm and intimate expressions typical of married life were found in their writings from other periods of their marriage; there are formal declarations of affection, but they are not romantic in the style of the time.

Another reason could be the chronological phase or absence of marital eroticism. However, the denial of sexuality, sexual coldness, or withdrawal did not appear in any accessible document as a unit to be analyzed. Marital sexual satisfaction constitutes a complex element and therefore cannot be universally standardized, which makes it impossible to form any serious judgment based on facts about the Whites’ intimate life. From Lewin’s perspective, this complexity within each conjugal group involves individual, differentiated demands of those involved, necessitating adjustment to the dynamics and arrangements of the group.³⁵ Moreover, the internal and external requirements for a marriage are different throughout life, such as in the presence or absence of children and in different states of health.

Another factor that relativizes conceptions, expectations, and sexual practices, particularly in marriage, refers to the very constitution of the human being that, according to Vygotsky, happens historically and socially. Accordingly, in addition to Lewin’s observation that demands and expectations vary from couple to couple in the same environment, one can conclude from Vygotsky that the concept and experience of acceptable sexuality for certain couples, in a certain culture, and in a particular point in time can be seen as inappropriate for other cultures or periods of time.

³⁴E.g., E. G. White, Letter 59, 1876; idem to Dear Sister Lucinda, 8 October 1874 (Letter 70, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem to Dear Husband, 11 April 1876 (Letter 5, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem to Dear Brother and Sister [E. P.] Daniells, April 1888 (Letter 10, 1888), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 4; idem to Dear Sister Peck, 15 September 1905 (Letter 265, 1905), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1.

³⁵Lewin, “Conflict in Marriage,” 92–93.

Therefore, it cannot be considered scientific practice to issue a judgment or venture any opinion without objective data for analysis—let alone from the call for “imagination,” a word used by Ronald Numbers for his argument in which he points to the coolness of Ellen as causing or aggravating their marriage conflicts. This lack of solid data is repeated when Numbers implies that the condemnation of sexual “excess”³⁶ in Ellen’s writings relates to an alleged apathy in her marital intimate life.³⁷ Available data does not point to the age factor or to sexual problems as elements generating tension in their relations, so these possibilities should be treated as speculation.

In addition, both seemed generally satisfied with their relationship, and there is no evidence indicating complaints regarding their sexual life or related to their age. The existence of offspring points to a married life with productive sexuality, independent of frequency or the use of separate bedrooms, which was due to Ellen’s habit of getting up very early in the mornings to write.³⁸

³⁶Often the theme of “excess” or “intemperance of every kind” (E. G. White, *Selected Messages* [Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1980], 3:280) appears in the writings of Ellen White concerning many aspects of life. For example: eating and drinking (cf. idem, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* [Battle Creek, MI: Good Health, 1890], 12; idem, *The Adventist Home*, 121; idem, *The Ministry of Healing* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905], 306); dressing (cf. idem, *Christian Temperance*, 12); working (cf. idem, *Christian Temperance*, 98–99); studying and amusement (cf. idem, “Our Children—Importance of Early Training,” *Health Reformer* 13.2 [1878]: 44); physical exercise (idem, *Messages to Young People* [Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1930], 179); and “any excesses” of married lives (idem, *Testimonies for the Church* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948], 2:472), among several similar references.

³⁷Ronald L. Numbers, “Sex, Science, and Salvation: The Sexual Advice of Ellen G. White and John Harvey Kellogg,” in *Right Living: An Anglo-American Tradition of Self-Help, Medicine and Hygiene*, ed. Charles E. Rosenberg [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003], 206–226). Numbers states, “One can only imagine how he [James] felt about Ellen’s coolness toward sex and her heartfelt condemnations of marital ‘excess.’ . . . She remained generally antipathetic toward sex, though she always stopped short of advocating celibacy” (Ibid., 212; idem, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 217). Numbers’s conclusions contradict Ellen’s own statements that, though living in a time when restraint was exercised in speaking or writing about sex, she wrote some words about the “privilege of the married life” and that “Jesus did not enforce celibacy upon any class of men” (E. G. White, *The Adventist Home*, 121–122; see Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 105–106). Numbers’s analysis, therefore, is devoid of data and an insinuation about the intimate lives of the Whites. A response was given to the claims of Numbers in 1976, when he published the first edition of his book (Numbers, *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health* [Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1976], 15, 71–74).

³⁸The first house built by the Whites in 1856 had separate bedrooms for James and Ellen, and in some of the other houses they later built or purchased followed the same pattern (Wheeler, *James White*, 90). Separate bedrooms were not a general custom of the time, although some followed this custom in the Victorian age (Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2004], 38). James worked hard during the day in administrative

On the other hand, the absence of intimate sexual references in their private letters may indicate that the subject did not occupy the first place in the couple's agenda.³⁹ The fact is that no data is available in the analyzed materials that register complaints from the Whites on that subject during any stage of their married life.

The Mission as the Main Meaning

The analysis of the Whites' context and letters points to a marriage guided by their sense of mission and love for the cause. In the relationship they developed, they "both knew from the outset that their marriage would not be the typical Victorian arrangement in which the wife was expected only to care for children, nurture her husband, and physically maintain the home."⁴⁰ So, the couple united due to the mission context and to accomplish the mission.⁴¹

occupations that involved making important decisions. This required him to have a good night's sleep, while Ellen woke up during the night or early in the morning to write. The most convenient option for both to lead an efficient and industrious life was adopting separate rooms to sleep. This does not seem to demonstrate a relationship problem between them. Examples of their good relationship are shown in some statements of Ellen's. In 1860, she lovingly wrote to James, "You may be assured I miss your little visits in my room" (E. [G. White] to Dear husband, 12 October 1860 [Letter 10, 1860], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1 [quoted in A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 1:426]). On another occasion, she said that, when traveling, she preferred sleeping alone to sharing space with other women, except her friend Lucinda, and said about James, "I prize my being all to myself unless graced with your presence. I want to share my bed only with you" (idem to Dear Husband, 13 April 1876 [Letter 6, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1). The couple also had a custom of spending time chatting on some nights before going to sleep (idem, "Christ and the Law," 19 June 1889 [Manuscript 5, 1899], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 10).

³⁹Though the Whites lived and worked in a time "of great restraint toward speaking publicly or writing of sex and the sexual relationship between husbands and wives," Ellen, "an ardent advocate of a high standard of purity and holiness," condemned "extreme positions in the matter of the relation of husbands and wives." In her thoughts about the "privilege of the marriage relation" she always condemned both extremes: (1) "sexual excess" or (2) a life of continence in order to reach a higher spiritual level. She pleaded for a moderate course as appropriate for the Christian believer (A. L. White, "Ellen G. White and Marriage Relations," *Ministry* 42.3 [1969]: 6–8, 26–27; *ibid.*, 42.4 [1969]: 19–21, 23; cf. E. G. White, *Mind, Character and Personality* [Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Publications, 1977], 1:218–239; Miroslav M. Kiš, "Sexuality," *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 1155–1157; Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon, *The Prophet and Her Critics: A Striking New Analysis Refutes the Charges that Ellen G. White "Borrowed" the Health Message* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005], 80–86; Ingemar Lindén, *The Last Trump: An Historico-genetical Study of Some Important Chapters in the Making and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* [Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1978], 270–278).

⁴⁰Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy," 5; cf. Degler, *At Odds*, 8–9, 26.

⁴¹Circumstances and the "great work" led James to ponder that they "could greatly assist each other in that work." "As she should come before the public," reasoned

The mission occupies a central position in the content of the analyzed letters. The terms “duty,” “work,” “cause,” “mission,” and the like appear more than seventy times in one set of letters,⁴² and much of the other correspondence between Ellen and James centers on issues related to work. Even expressions of mutual attention, the desire for James’s recovery, or marital conflict are almost always connected to work. These references indicate that the Whites did not experience their marriage as a romantic love relationship in the nineteenth-century style, but functioned as a working group (Lewin) to serve Jesus until He returned and the mission was accomplished.⁴³ However, despite the centrality of work, the letters clearly show James and Ellen expressing caring and devoted mutual concern:

My husband is very attentive to me, seeking in every way to make my journeyings and labor pleasant and relieve it of weariness. He is very cheerful and of good courage.⁴⁴

We were very glad to receive [the] postal that you had arrived safe at your journey’s end. We have not forgotten to pray for you. Every day we asked our heavenly Father to guard you, bless and strengthen you.⁴⁵

I miss you and would love to be with you if this was the will of God.⁴⁶

I love my family and nothing but a sense of duty can separate me from them.⁴⁷

They had no time or thought for romantic love, because it was not attractive to them. This picture may have seemed dull to the teenagers of their time or to those focused on pleasures and achievements in marriage. But, while the intrinsic marital projects of the couple are legitimate, Ellen

James, “she needed a lawful protector, and God having chosen her as a channel of light and truth to the people in a special sense, she could be of great help to” him (J. White and E. G. White, *Life Sketches* [1880], 126, cf. 238; E. G. White, “Interview with Mrs. E. G. White Regarding Early Experiences,” 13 August 1906 [Manuscript 131, 1906], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 6). Ellen clearly stated that their “hearts were united in the great work” (idem, *Testimonies*, 1:75; idem, *Life Sketches* [1915], 97).

⁴²Those that appear in idem, *Daughters of God*, 260–275; and A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:424–445.

⁴³This experience and compromise did not exclude affection, sympathy, or feeling good being together. With proximity and commonality in the mission, they developed admiration, respect, and love for each other (“White, Ellen Gould [Harmon]” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, ed. Don F. Neufeld [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1996], 874).

⁴⁴[E. G. White] to Dear Sister Lucinda, 17 June 1875 (Letter 46, 1875), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; idem, *Daughters of God*, 261.

⁴⁵Idem, Letter 3, 1876, 2.

⁴⁶Idem to Dear Husband, 20 April 1876 (Letter 11, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2.

⁴⁷J. White to My Dear Ellen, 1 November 1860, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 1:427.

and James were experiencing something more. The symbolic universe of the couple indicates a clear commitment to their religious life, and they did not seem to know how to live otherwise.

The meanings present in the units of analysis of James and Ellen's letters can be difficult to understand for the romantic generation raised on "liquid love," as described by Zygmunt Bauman, which is of uncanny frailty, with no permanent or durable bonds, and primarily self-centered.⁴⁸ The meanings of the Whites' love have, as their organizing center, a mission that they both embraced. Theirs can be described as a marriage in service to that great mission, as these lines below demonstrate:

Let us pray each day in faith, not only for health, but to be imbued with the Spirit of God that we may do the work committed to our trust to His acceptance. This is what I live for. I have no other ambition.⁴⁹

I so desire that you may have a clear and cheerful mind to do the will of God. A great work is before us that others cannot do. Our experience is of value to this cause.⁵⁰

Mine has been a peculiar work. It was my duty to stand by the side of Mrs. White in her work of delivering the reproofs of the Lord.⁵¹

[E]specially when Mrs. White and I pray by ourselves, [These moments] are very precious. . . . We see a great work to be done, and we believe that God will raise us up to bear some part in it.⁵²

The work is moving everywhere. . . . We are able to accomplish thrice the amount of labor at present that we have been able to do at any time during the past three years. And Mrs. White comes from the excessive labors of the past season with better health, and courage, than at any time in her life. God is good. He helps those who are willing to wear out, and lets those have their way who choose to rust out.⁵³

This kind of experience is peculiar to this couple. The Whites' marriage was not bourgeois or overtly romantic (based on feeling and passion), Malthusian (based on capitalist reasons), contemporary (with individualistic morality or just for fun), or under any other label. However, in the couple's own perception, their marriage was one of mutual love, made possible by

⁴⁸Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), passim.

⁴⁹E. G. White to Dear Husband, 11 July 1874 (Letter 41, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:439.

⁵⁰E. [G. White] to Dear Husband, 15 July 1874 (Letter 43, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3.

⁵¹J. White, *A Solemn Appeal to the Ministry and the People* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1873), 6; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:427.

⁵²J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 11–12; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:429. The statement clearly presents James's hope of recovering and working together with his wife again.

⁵³J. W[hite], "The Signs of the Times," *RH* 44.19 (1874): 152; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:457.

the divine providence that chose James to stand alongside and support the messenger of God in the transmission of their messages.

At the beginning of their family life (a time of many financial difficulties for the couple), during the “early history of the [Adventist] cause,” James admitted that they had to work hard and lived in strict economy, wearing “poor clothing” and suffering “for want of proper food,” as well as trying to find means to invest in the propagation of the gospel.⁵⁴ Providence placed alongside Ellen someone to complement her and help her to satisfactorily fulfill her task. The meanings of words in their private correspondence are directly opposed to the contemporary goals of the existentialist or romantic mentalities of nineteenth-century culture.

Theoretically, the concept of *living experience*, presented by Vygotski, refers to a unique experience that cannot be replicated in another’s life, even someone living in the same time period. This is simply because it is an experience of that moment, of those people, with interactions and ways to relate to the world that surround them through social practices.⁵⁵

So, while they were a typical nineteenth-century couple in many aspects, the singular experience of the Whites and their speeches and practices show a unique worldview built on relations with the Adventist movement and the prophetic gift, in the certainty that their divine mission would take them to the soon return of Jesus. Because of this worldview, they lived their marriage as consecrated to the mission. This is the living experience of the Whites that cannot be analyzed outside of this universe, unique to the couple, their immediate context, and their contemporaries who shared the same ideals.

Also, in this theoretical framework, consistency between practice and meaning creates individual or group coherence. In this sense, biographical or autobiographical data from the couple’s life, when compared with the meanings present in the material analyzed, point to practices being consistent with speeches in their marriage group.

Thus, when considering the theological aspect of the question, the experience of James and Ellen, reflected in the feeling of teamwork and their focus on the mission, presents itself as the most coherent and sensible course of married life, particularly in its practical contempt for the romanticism of their time. Who, after all, in good conscience, having direct communication with the Almighty, and receiving from Him the mission to warn the world because the Savior is about to come, could fail to put the mission first, without being inconsistent with such a privilege and his own belief?

In the above sense, the marriage of the Whites may seem anachronistic, but even in the face of James’s crisis, the divergent opinions between him

⁵⁴J. W[hite], “Present and Future,” *RH* 56.14 (1880): 216; cf. J. W[hite], “Our Missions,” *RH* 55.6 (1880): 88; J. White and E. G. White, *Life Sketches* (1880), 129, 242–44; [E. G. White], “European General Council,” 21 September 1885 (Manuscript 19, 1885), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1–5; J. White, *Life Incidents*, 274; E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:94.

⁵⁵Ana Luiza Bustamante Smolka, “O (im)próprio e o (im)pertinente na Apropriação das Práticas Sociais,” *Cadernos Cedes* 22.50 (Abril 2000): 26–40.

and Ellen, or their renunciation of a home life with their children, the couple never lost sight of the sovereign reason that united them. At no time or place did their marriage become incoherent or inconsistent with its central and unique reference of life.⁵⁶ Their sense of teamwork worked as a strengthening element of the marital bond.

These indicators in the lives of the Whites do not allow the researcher, from the data present in the documents, to consider their marriage empty or meaningless. Rather, the data points to an intense union with a mission, its greatest risk being their extreme involvement with each other and their mission, leading to one or both abandoning or destroying the group by an excess of activity leading to “oversatiation.”⁵⁷ However, also in this regard, James and Ellen’s efforts were well defined and objective, always working to harmonize their marriage and their mission.

It is clear, therefore, that the love of James and Ellen did not fit the concept of romantic love of the nineteenth century, although the data indicates affection, attention, mutual care, productive sexuality, and lifelong marital fidelity. Their relationship contained solid couple elements and was independent of the traditional concept of romantic love, which is a transient social construction. Their relationship, as shown in the data, was focused on the mission as its dominant meaning, but this was not exclusive of other meanings. In addition, they had a sense of teamwork with clear, concrete, and achievable goals, working as an element that strengthened and gave meaning to the union—an element in the lives of successful couples, as pointed out by Lewin.⁵⁸

On the other hand, work, when interwoven with marriage, can conspire against the marriage, since it can take priority over the needs of a member or work against the dynamics of the marriage. This issue will be addressed in the next section, which deals with barriers present in the Whites’ marriage.

Barriers in the Marital Relationship of the Whites

James’s Personality and His Disease

Two of the barriers in the Whites’ marital relationship are connected to James, namely his personality and disease. At first glance, James’s problem could be

⁵⁶As can be seen in the literature produced by the couple, it was never easy for them to leave their children in the care of others to dedicate themselves to the itinerant service of preaching and visiting. Ellen said that of the many difficulties and sacrifices involved in the mission, “the greatest sacrifice I was called to make in connection with the work was to leave my children to the care of others” (E. G. White, *Testimonies*, 1:101; cf. 1:87, 581; idem, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:107–108; idem to My Dear Children, 20 September 1859 (Letter 23, 1859), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; J. White to Dear Brother and Sister in Port Gibson, [NY], 26 August 1848, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; J. White, *Life Incidents*, 293; J. White and E. G. White, *Life Sketches* [1880], 243–244, 254–255).

⁵⁷Lewin, “Conflict in Marriage,” 92.

⁵⁸Ibid.

regarded as arising directly and exclusively from post-stroke consequences,⁵⁹ suggesting an exclusively organic-medical origin for his aggressive, suspicious, and controlling behavior during the 1874 and 1876 crises, particularly.

However, this explanation, based on a single physical factor, is contradicted by data from James's and Ellen's speeches and the descriptions of his grandson, Arthur White. James had been building the framework for this behavior for some time, since his first contacts with warning messages about how his manner would reflect on his health,⁶⁰ as follows:

From the time of my first acquaintance with the one whom God has chosen to speak through to His erring people up to the time of the last vision, I have been cautioned from time to time of my danger of speaking, while under the pressure of a sense of the wrongs of others, in an unguarded manner, and using words that would not have the best effect on those I reproved.⁶¹

I have been warned to trust in God, and let Him fight my battles and vindicate my cause, and not suffer my mind to dwell upon the course of those who had injured me. But in my "peculiar trials" I have lost sight of such blessed admonitions, and have dwelt upon the wrongs of others greatly to my injury. My courage, faith, and health have suffered on the account.⁶²

Thus, the disease had a circular or vicious origin: first, his behavior led to his illness, and then the stroke caused further behavior changes, which, in turn, sickened him further. In addition, to Ellen, the cause of James's illness did not "exist in reality," being a production of James's mind that affected his health and not the opposite. Ellen wrote,

And it is not so much that I am afflicted with your distrust and suspicions of me that troubles me, but that you let it afflict you. It wears upon your health, and I am unable to remove the cause because it does not exist in reality.⁶³

Ellen also attributed a spiritual meaning to the origin of James's problem:

I cannot but feel that the enemy is making you miserable by keeping your mind upon matters that are of no profit, but only an injury. . . . Satan sees your weakness in this respect, and he will make every effort to attack you just where he has succeeded so often.⁶⁴

Ellen pointed out that James's health depended on whether he could keep control over letting "the wrongs or supposed wrongs of others depress and dishearten" him. This situation was not merely caused by organic and physiological factors, but by the fragility of James to exercise the power of his will and resist the "temptations of the devil," as follows:

⁵⁹E. G. White, *Daughters of God*, 260.

⁶⁰Knight, *Walking with Ellen White*, 72.

⁶¹J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 6; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:426–427; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 544.

⁶²J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 8; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:427.

⁶³E. [G. White] to My dear Husband, 2 July 1874 (Letter 38, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:433–434.

⁶⁴E. G. White to Dear Husband, 8 July 1874 (Letter 40, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:435–436.

I want you to be happy. Your health and life depend upon your being happy and cheerful. No matter what course others pursue, this need not have such all-controlling power over your mind. Just as long as you will let the wrongs or supposed wrongs of others depress and dishearten you, you will have enough of this business to attend to.⁶⁵

Light, precious light . . . He [God] will let beam upon you to be imparted to others, if you will only resist the temptations of the devil to write and talk out your feelings of trial, your temptations, and your discouragements.⁶⁶

Therefore, although the disease revealed a sharper picture of James's behavior, the documents show several contributing factors in addition to illness: overwork,⁶⁷ his tendency to dwell on the mistakes of others,⁶⁸ and his lack of will to resist evil thoughts and temptations of the devil.⁶⁹

In addition, documents and authors used in this research describe James as exceeding at work by his zeal, taking on different roles, writing, establishing institutions, and traveling extensively, as he himself admits:

⁶⁵Ibid., 2:435.

⁶⁶Ibid., 2:436.

⁶⁷Before the 1870s, James had sometimes already recognized that his frail health prevented him from continuing to work actively in the activities he accumulated as a church leader (e.g. in 1855, see A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 1:334; W. C. White, "Early Memories of Our First Home," no. 30 of "Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White," *RH* 113.7 [1936]: 6–7). During that time (1855), the "anxiety of mind," added to James's burdens and labors in the office, traveling responsibilities, the death of his dear siblings (Nathaniel and Anna), and "the lack of sympathy from those who should have shared his labors," "were too much for his strength" (E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:194–195; idem, *Testimonies*, 1:97–98; idem to Dear Brother and Sister Loveland, 24 January 1856 [Letter 2a, 1856], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD). On several occasions, Ellen emphasized the fact that James did "the work of three men," and she "never saw a man work so energetically" and "so constantly" as James, to the point that she suggested that "God does give him more than mortal energy" (idem to Dear Willie, 17 August 1876 [Letter 39, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; cf. idem to Dear Cousin Reed, 1870 [Letter 20, 1870], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; idem, "Lessons from the Fifty-Eighth [Chapter] of Isaiah, 23 January 1904 [Manuscript 8, 1904], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 11; idem, "Remember the Sabbath Day, to Keep it Holy," 10 November 1906 [Manuscript 146, 1906], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; idem to Dear Sister Belden, 26 December 1906 [Letter 396, 1906], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1–2).

⁶⁸J. White to Dear Brother Abraham [Dodge], 31 July 1853, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1–2; E. G. White, "Extracts of Visions," July 1853 (Manuscript 5, 1853), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; cf. idem to Dear Brother and Sister Dodge, 3 August 1853 (Letter 6, 1853), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; Cf. idem, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:194–195; J. White, "Health Reform—No. 4," *Health Reformer* 5.8 (1871): 152–153.

⁶⁹Cf. E. G. White, "Testimony Regarding James and Ellen White," 6 June 1863 (Manuscript 1, 1863), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; W. C. White, "Sketches and Memories," *RH* 113.56 (1936): 3.

Had I heeded these warnings as I should, I would have been able to stand against the temptations to overwork pressed upon me by my brethren, and a love to labor while seeing so much to do. And now, as the consequence, just as the field is opening as never before, and there is so much very important work to be done, I have found myself for a few weeks past unable to do anything.⁷⁰

Thus, James worked to excess, to the point of being unable to resist “temptations to overwork.” He was always looking for what remained to be done, indicating the association of two frames favorable to stress: overwork and anxiety over what to do.

Rupture, Unsatisfied Need, and Loss of Meaning

This excess involvement at work is supported by some of James’s statements,⁷¹ with the reports of his biographers, and with statements from Ellen.⁷² The constant thought of *much remains to be done* must have become a greater burden even on the global scale of the challenge before him and the few who accompanied him to proclaim the threefold message deposited in the hands of the newborn church (Rev 14:6–12). So James, in that situation, suddenly found himself unable to carry out the mission that occupied the center of his personal and marital life. He suddenly suffered what Tania Zittoun calls “rupture” in his life story, and this required a response or adjustment of the body to the new situation.⁷³

The process of adjustment to a new situation is called a “transition.” The meanings present in the transition of James, facing the loss of his place in church business and as an inseparable partner to Ellen, were insecurity; complaints; mistrust, jealousy, and later guilt; regret for his conduct; and finally confessing his mistake—a process that unfolded until his death.⁷⁴ In this process, he struggled to return to the previous path, only to fall successively. James’s trials before the rupture affected primarily the peripheral areas of his personal and marital life. But as someone addicted to work, when he was jettisoned from the process, his frame reversed to an “unsatisfied need” or “state of hunger” condition.⁷⁵

Considering the expected reactions to unmet needs within conjugal groups, and in this case of a couple so strongly intertwined with their work, the

⁷⁰J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 8–9; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:428.

⁷¹E.g., J. White, “Private,” 1855, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1.

⁷²E.g., E. G. White to Dear Brethren and Sisters, 16 December 1854 (Letter 5, 1854), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1.

⁷³Tania Zittoun, “Dynamics of Life-course Transitions: A Methodological Reflection,” in *Dynamic Process Methodology in the Social and Developmental Sciences*, eds. Jaan Valsiner et al. (New York: Springer, 2009), 405–429.

⁷⁴Cf. A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:442–445; E. G. White, *In Memoriam. A Sketch of the Last Sickness and Death of Elder James White Who Died at Battle Creek, Michigan, August 6, 1881, together with the Discourse Preached at His Funeral* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1881), 44–50.

⁷⁵Lewin, “Conflict in Marriage,” 89, 91–92.

“hunger” that James felt from his separation from Ellen and his responsibilities might have led him to express apathy and aggression, to abandon the marital group, or to attempt to destroy it if circumstances had worsened.⁷⁶ The data indicates that James’s period of dealing with his rupture, during his transition, was quite painful, marked by insecurity, complaints, desire for domination over Ellen, and jealousy that someone else was influencing her ministry in the way he understood belonged to him.

Lewin points to “the state of hunger” as a tension-generating element that, if not relieved by the individual adapting to the new conditions in the group, can lead to dissolution. In this sense, independent of James’s illness, his tension and aggression, or even apathy, could have been generated by another barrier between him and his psychological goal. It would be enough that any barrier would last long enough to generate hunger and anxiety and be interpreted as impossible to remove or lasting indefinitely, which would be unbearable for him.⁷⁷

Thus, the unusual behavior of James can be described as a coherent result of the sudden and disabling rupture and the inability to keep up with his work. Another aspect related to James’s suffering is the emptiness produced because of the significance that this work had for him, as a global movement leader who was preparing the world for Jesus’s return. Thus, we can see the “state of hunger” and loss of meaning in life, since the mission was the dominant meaning in their relationship and gave meaning to their existence. This emptying of meaning and “state of hunger” can help clarify the oscillation between the apathy, frustration, and aggression that served as barriers in the marital relationship.

Losses and Coherence/Consistency

James’s mistrust towards others may also have been related to the loss of his exclusive position. Although he had no academic training, James’s work evidences clarity and exceptional competence. This performance was a result of above average intelligence and skill at written and oral communication, described by Ellen in these words: “God has given you a good intellect—I might say a giant intellect.” He had a special talent in writing and speech, described by Ellen as unique: “[N]o one can speak or write words that will sway so powerful an influence as yourself, and gladness, hope, and courage are put into all hearts.”⁷⁸

James also believed that he had a unique mission as an aid in the transmission of the prophecies: “Mine has been a peculiar work. It was my duty to stand by the side of Mrs. White in her work of delivering the reproofs of the Lord.”⁷⁹ He called this mission his “peculiar work” and “duty” to, together with Ellen, deliver “the reproofs of the Lord.” These meanings show

⁷⁶Ibid., 89, 91.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸E. [G. White], Letter 38, 1874, 2; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:433.

⁷⁹J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 6; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:427.

that James understood his role with Ellen to be almost irreplaceable. For him, his work was unique and sacred, since it was related to the transmission of revelations given to Ellen.⁸⁰

Accordingly, the meanings appear to be too important and, at the same time, not transferrable. If James's work was taken away from him, whatever the reason, it would be too much for him, and the other possible candidates to accompany Ellen or counsel her would be objects of suspicion and jealousy, described by Lewin as the feeling that something that is "ours" is being stolen. As shown in the documents analyzed, the jealous frame can involve possessiveness of the beloved object, disqualification of competitors and distrust or blackmail, for example. As a result, there may be patrolling and control of the object that is about to be lost.⁸¹ However, in the analyzed documents, James's jealousy is related to work and his position next to the messenger of the Lord, as it was his duty to advise her. The suspicion that others would be influencing Ellen appears in his speech: he hoped that this influence would be removed: "Elders Butler and Haskell have had an influence over her that I hope to see broken. It has nearly ruined her."⁸² However, Ellen, who always remained independent of external influences in her prophetic ministry, pointed out the unjustified jealousy of James, which evolved even years later: "But if you are coming to discourage and weaken yourself and me by censure and suspicion and jealousy, I fear we should do great injury to the cause of God."⁸³

Therefore, among other reasons, as noted above, James's strong temper can be understood as resulting from the limitations that the psychological and health crisis imposed with regard to the fulfillment of his "duty,"⁸⁴ as well as his departure from his intense work agenda as a prominent church leader. The desired outcome of the crisis, in these lines in the letters, always related to returning to work and Ellen's company, not in the sense of restoring their marriage (which had not been broken or denied), but in the sense of fulfilling the duty to do good for the church's mission.

On the other hand, the data indicates that James, despite the tensions and conflicts, insecurities and suspicions, did not give up on his mission. Although aged and broken, he found ways to reflect on his mistakes, acknowledge them,

⁸⁰See, for example, this statement that James wrote to his son, "I hope you will not encourage Mother to print her books without me. If she chooses to say and write, very good. Then when May has all completed it will be but a small job for me to plan and arrange. Willie, you know I should hear every line read first" (J. White to My Dear Willie, 16 May 1876, Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1).

⁸¹Lewin, "Conflict in Marriage," 99–100.

⁸²A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:445. In another occasion (1873), James and George Butler disagreed on leadership and church administration, and Ellen pointed out that Butler was acting wrongly ([E. G. White], "Diary," 8 May 1873 [Manuscript 7, 1873], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 6).

⁸³Idem to Dear Husband, 10 July 1874 (Letter 40a, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:438.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 2:427.

and seek divine acceptance.⁸⁵ He did not reject his faith, repudiate the cause of the Advent, or deny his allegiance to Ellen (although they diverged in matters of personal opinion), but reaffirmed his belief and submission to the prophetic gift, as stated:

I have never doubted the visions of Mrs. W[hite]. If a trial or temptation had for a moment come over my mind, as I did not, and could not, understand all, I at once fell back upon the vast amount of clear evidence in their favor, and there rested until all was made clear. . . . I have clearly seen the position and importance of the Testimonies in the work of the third message, and have prized them highly, and have designed ever to conform to their teachings. But I have not given them that reflection and attention I should. I have not read them over and over in order to keep their teachings fresh in my mind, as I should.⁸⁶

And now, as the consequence, just as the field is opening as never before, and there is so much very important work to be done, I have found myself for a few weeks past unable to do anything. And my cry has been, from December 20–26, [1872,] and still is, that God will raise me up once more and put His word within me, that I may have a part in the closing triumphs of the last message.⁸⁷

I have been able to make the full surrender of all to God, and as I have confessed my sins to God and those with me, and united with them in prayer for pardon, and restoration to peace of mind, faith, hope, and physical strength and health, the Spirit of God has come upon us in a wonderful degree.⁸⁸

I now feel sure that God has forgiven my sins, so far as I have seen them, and confessed them in the spirit of true repentance. My sins do not longer separate me from God. And as I have made a determined effort to draw nigh to God, He has come very nigh to me. That terrible weight of discouragement and gloom that has been upon me much of the time for the past two years is gone from me, and hope, courage, peace, and joy have taken its place.⁸⁹

James thus reaffirmed his belief, maintained his marital fidelity, and declared that he was “never” suspicious of the prophetic gift of Ellen. Therefore, despite James’s painful transition through disease and loss, mistakes and regret, the central aspects of his life (values, beliefs, and hopes), remained consistent with his speech until his last days. In this sense, we find a human James, who, despite his weaknesses, did not allow them to change the dominant meanings of his marriage and religious life. In this regard, James White appears as a wounded warrior who did not abandon the battlefield of their faith, and although he fell, remained always loyal to his ideals.

⁸⁵Cf. *Ibid.*, 2:427–429, 445.

⁸⁶J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 5; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:426; Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 544.

⁸⁷J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 8–9; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:428.

⁸⁸J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 11; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:428–429.

⁸⁹J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*, 11; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:429.

The Medical Explanation

As already mentioned, the medical explanation for the origin of James's crisis, and how it was reflected in their marriage does not provide a satisfactory answer. The emphasis on a medical explanation for James's problems can be found in the hygiene campaign to improve the quality of life. Flavia Lemos and Daniele Vasco point out that medicalization is the transformation of social, political, economic, cultural, and subjective questions into medical issues.⁹⁰

In the above sense, religious leaders, artists, and heroes, among others, tend to acquire a legendary meaning in the imaginations of people, especially fans of their ideological trend, cause, or religion. It is no different with James White, the pioneer and co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and partner and husband of the prophetess. The medical explanation can be used in behavioral cases socially considered "troublesome" to remove the responsibility for that behavior from the individual and society—part of the trend of hygienist ethics and of medicalization that emerged in the Western world in the second half of the nineteenth century.

But this concern with James's image is unnecessary. The James from the reports is not the James who was "made-up" and idealized to meet the artificial expectations of those who contemplate him. James appears as an ordinary and an extraordinary human being at the same time. Ordinary because he was real, and marriages and individuals without conflicts or difficulty do not exist, especially in the case of the Whites, considering their stress at work, James's temper, and his illness.

Only the ordinary James can be an example and warning to other human beings. If the conjugal life of the Whites did not contain these elements common to the human race, it would have been the product of fantasy, an idealization, an artificial construct of their biographers, or an apathetic and indifferent relationship of appearances. However, these possibilities cannot be true because the James described in the research data was human, real, common, and true. James suffered, Ellen suffered, and the people around him suffered with him; and where there is pain, there is a real person. So, we have the James that best fits the real world.

But James is also extraordinary because, according to the records, he stood out in making an unusual contribution with his exceptional talents at a key moment in the history of the Adventist Church, as he and Ellen believed. James was closer to the people when recognized as a human, subject to failure like any other. Few would follow a character that they knew to be fiction, but people will follow someone who is extraordinary, and yet one of them.

By identifying James as a common man, the extraordinary model shows that other common men can also be extraordinary. The strength of the example of James's life is, in fact, his real life, because of the ordinary dramas he lived, without disqualifying his outstanding contribution. So James's imperfection,

⁹⁰Flávia Cristina Silveira Lemos and Daniele dos Santos Vasco, "Alguns Percursos Históricos entre o Higienismo e a Medicalização na Atenção à Infância e às Famílias," *Revista do Difere* 2.4 (2012): 1–20.

like that of any human being, cannot be seen as a demerit to be made up for, denied, or softened.

Therefore, James's personality and disease were barriers in the relationship, since they were elements that generated tension and created distance between him and Ellen. In addition, these barriers temporarily compromised their partnership in fulfilling the mission, which was the factor that centralized and organized the meanings of their marriage. This experience constitutes an example of how God uses ordinary people for His extraordinary works.

Ellen's Independence

Ellen's independence generated tension in the relationship with James. He wanted to control her agenda and her life in a way he had not previously. Adding to the difficulties of the relationship was Ellen's withdrawal from the domestic scene to do the field job that demanded her presence. This independent attitude displeased James, who feared that others were taking his place as Ellen's counselors. This led Ellen to exercise her freedom and independence even further and to stay away until the tension between them eased.

This leads us to the discussion and analysis of the information given in the outburst letters from Ellen to Lucinda Hall, a family friend. Two types of reasons can be found for her behavior: missiological and psychological.

Regarding the missiological reasons, the letters mention that Ellen resisted James's control because she felt she had a duty to accomplish. Here again we see the centrality of their mission. Ellen's independence was not due to a personal whim, but her decision to be faithful to the ideals they both had adopted to serve God. As we shall see, she played a submissive role as a humble wife who had emotional needs, but kept them under control. She was conciliatory and concerned about James, but he was hindering her work, and not keeping his word, unlike what he had done until then:

He has said we must not seek to control each other. I do not own to doing it, but he has, and much more. I never felt as I do now in this matter. I cannot have confidence in James' judgment in reference to my duty.⁹¹

But the Lord knows what is best for me, for James, and the cause of God. My husband is now happy—blessed news. . . . I will do my work as God leads me. He may do his work as God leads him. We will not get in each other's way. My heart is fixed, trusting in God. I shall wait for God to open my way before me.⁹²

A letter received from my husband last night shows me that he is prepared to dictate to me and take positions more trying than ever before. I have decided to attend no camp meetings this season. I shall remain and write. My husband can labor alone best. I am sure I can.⁹³

⁹¹E. G. White to Dear Sister Lucinda, 10 May 1876 (Letter 64, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; idem, *Daughters of God*, 267.

⁹²Idem to Dear Sister Lucinda, 12 May 1876 (Letter 65, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 268.

⁹³Idem to Dear Lucinda, 16 May 1876 (Letter 66, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 268.

I see no light in my attending camp meetings. You and I decided this before you left. You must [not] allow the conference to press me out of the path of duty. The east will not see me for one year unless I feel that God calls me to go. He has given me my work. I will do it if I can be left free. I would enjoy attending the camp meetings if God said Go. I have no light as yet to go. The pillar of fire is here yet, when it moves I would move also. I want to follow it. I have no will of mine own; I want to do God's will. At present His will is to tarry in California and make the most of my time in writing. I shall be doing more for the cause in this than in going across the plains to attend camp meetings. I hope you will keep well.⁹⁴

Thus, (1) she needed to maintain independence at work, as she was under the direction of God and not her husband, and (2) she was being consistent with the dynamics of their marital team, which, until then, had united them through a single purpose while each had freedom of action. She also maintained consistency with the goal of the marital team, which was to fulfill the mission. Thus, Ellen's withdrawal was vital to her realization as a person and to the very meaning of her relationship with James. The mission was to be preserved and carried forward, even at the price of momentary separation:

Gladly would we attend the camp meetings east if we could feel that the Lord sends us. If it were duty I would go alone, but this is questionable.⁹⁵

I must be free to follow the leadings of the Spirit of God and go at His bidding, relying upon the light and sense of duty I feel, and leave you the same privilege. When we can work the best together we will do so. If God says it is for His glory we work apart occasionally, we will do that.⁹⁶

I miss you and would love you to be with you if this was the will of God, but He knoweth all things and will direct my path.⁹⁷

I love the labor connected with the camp meetings much better than I love writing. I enjoy traveling, but I feel that now is my time and opportunity to get out this long-neglected work. I desire the prayers of all my brethren that God would help me in the work rather than urgent appeals to attend camp meetings.⁹⁸

I waited for my husband's consent, and when, after a most solemn, humble seeking of God, . . . my husband wept aloud and said, "Ellen, you must go. . . . But what shall I do without you?"⁹⁹

⁹⁴Idem to Dear Husband, 7 April 1876 (Letter 4, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

⁹⁵Idem to My Dear Willie, 15 May 1874 (Letter 27, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:430.

⁹⁶E. [G. White] to My dear Husband, 2 July 1874 (Letter 38, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:434.

⁹⁷[E. G. White], Letter 11, 1876.

⁹⁸Idem to Dear Husband, 25 April 1876 (Letter 14, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1.

⁹⁹Idem, "Fragment—Reminiscences of Early Days in California," 1895 (Manuscript 62, 1895), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1 (This experience occurred in 1874 [A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:419–420, 430]). Ellen felt relieved

Therefore, the separation between Ellen and James during the crisis was justified by the missiological reasons that maintained and gave meaning to their unity. As Lewin points out, the loss of meaning in the marriage conspires against its unity.¹⁰⁰ The separation was necessary and, ultimately, understood by James.

The second set of reasons for Ellen's temporary separation from James were psychological. These reasons can be clearly identified in statements by both of them. James's temperament, with the changes caused by the disease, produced disturbance where once there was balance. He increasingly tried to dominate and control his wife, and felt jealousy related to the loss of his position. Ellen tried to help her husband and stood beside him until she felt exhausted and worn,¹⁰¹ while maintaining her willingness to help him, as seen in her claims during that time:

I am thoroughly disgusted with this state of things, and do not mean to place myself where there is the least liability of its occurring. . . . I can but dread the liability of James' changeable moods, his strong feelings, his censures, his viewing me in the light he does, and has felt free to tell me his ideas of my being led by a wrong spirit, my restricting his liberty, et cetera. . . . I cannot endure the thought of marring the work and cause of God by such depression as I have experienced all unnecessarily.¹⁰²

I cannot, and will not, be crippled as I have been.¹⁰³

The care falls principally upon me.¹⁰⁴

when James understood the situation, as we see in these two examples: "I feel relieved in reading your last letter. I shall now feel it my duty to remain here this year and write and shall not attend the camp meeting this season without positive evidence that God requires it of me" ([E. G. White] to Dear Husband, 6 May 1876 [Letter 22, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2); "I am glad you continue free and happy, and that you feel so well satisfied in regard to my remaining in California. And that you are relieved of all burden of my writings. I am as pleased in regard to this as you are" (idem to Dear Husband, 11 May 1876 [Letter 24, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1).

¹⁰⁰Lewin, "Conflict in Marriage," 93, 95–98.

¹⁰¹Shortly after the stroke in 1865, James was so weak that he was forced into a temporary leave. After accompanying James to Dansville, New York, for three months of nursing hydrotherapy, Ellen decided to take care of him more appropriately at home (E. G. White, "Our Late Experience," *RH* 27.13 [1866]: 97–99). Although James was officially the president of the General Conference, he was unable to take care of administrative matters for a while. Thus, during 1866 and 1867, Ellen decided to put aside many of her responsibilities (travel, writing, etc.) and devote herself almost exclusively to his health. The Whites sold their home in Battle Creek and bought a small farm in Greenville, Michigan, where Ellen engaged James in both physical and mental work outdoors, which contributed greatly to his recovery (J. White and E. G. White, *Life Sketches* [1888], 354–358; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:157–168, 188–189).

¹⁰²E. G. White, Letter 64, 1876, 1–2; idem, *Daughters of God*, 266–267.

¹⁰³Idem, Letter 65, 1876, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 268.

¹⁰⁴Idem to Edson and Emma White, 28 September 1877 (Letter 19, 1877), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 273.

While Ellen acknowledged the care that her husband had for her when sick¹⁰⁵ and wanted to be with him during his illness,¹⁰⁶ things staying the same could have allowed the tension in the relationship to reach a point of compromise in the marriage.¹⁰⁷ The marital relationship is built on a common history of verbal exchanges and a common life.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, changes in the agenda of a spouse inevitably affect the other. This change was administered by Ellen in two stages: (1) staying with her husband while the mission could wait, and (2) in view of his signs of improvement and the wear on the relationship due to the change in James's actions and speech, continuing work without her husband's company.

In this sense, Ellen's attitude is perfectly understandable and even commendable, because staying near her spouse increased his controlling attitude and risked both aspects most cherished by the couple themselves: the fulfillment of the mission and the marriage bond. Thus, Ellen leaving the scene functioned as a stress-relief measure.

Lewin declares that control exerted by one spouse increases tension because it reduces what he calls free space, a vital necessity for individual and marital health. This reduction in space in the framework of conflict presented was associated with the dominant significance of the relationship (the fulfillment of the mission), which gave meaning and organized the symbolic universe of their marriage, and provided consistency to the existence of the couple and meaning to their lives, individually.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵"I had been all my life an invalid, and tenderly and patiently had my husband sympathized with, watched over, and cared for me when I was suffering" (idem, "Early Counsels on Medical Work—No. 4: Blessings Through Prayer," *RH* 91.17 [1914]: 3; cf. idem, "Our Late Experience," *RH* 27.13 [1866]: 97).

¹⁰⁶"I have no special news to write you, except I greatly desire to see your face and look forward to the time with great pleasure" (idem to Dear Husband, 17 July 1874 (Letter 44, 1874), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3).

¹⁰⁷"Having the opportunity to 'recharge your batteries,' whether alone or with friends and family, is even more important when you are a caregiving spouse, especially if you are overloaded with heavy care demands or if you are providing care and also performing multiple other roles. As a caregiver, you have to make time to care *for yourself*—both to keep yourself healthy (physically and mentally) and to manage stress" (Sara Palmer and Jeffrey B. Palmer, *When Your Spouse Has a Stroke: Caring for Your Partner, Yourself, and Your Relationship* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011], Kindle edition; italics original).

¹⁰⁸Terezinha Féres-Carneiro, "Pesquisa e Prática Clínica: Construindo Articulações Teóricas," *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* 21.3 (2008): 349–355; Terezinha Féres-Carneiro and Orestes Diniz-Neto, "De Onde Viemos? Uma Revisão Histórico Conceitual da Psicoterapia de Casal," *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa* 24.4 (2008): 487–496; Marilene A. Grandesso, *Sobre a Reconstrução do Significado: Uma Análise Epistemológica e Hermenêutica da Prática Clínica* (São Paulo: Casa do Psicólogo, 2000), 212–238, 305–312.

¹⁰⁹Lewin, "Conflict in Marriage," 86–90, 93–94.

Sometimes a tense situation cannot be resolved, leading one or both spouses to withdraw from the group, destroying the conjugality.¹¹⁰ James's desire to have Ellen close and control her worked as an external barrier to relieving tension. Ellen faced a dilemma: stay with her husband, which seemed to be the solution, or leave to accomplish the mission, which might seem strange at first for a kind wife. Since her leaving was not final—her spouse was either under the care of someone she could trust or recovered and working elsewhere—her decision was the most productive one. James was reasonably recovered and could be alone, and she followed his progress through daily correspondence with plans to reconnect at the proper time and in the proper conditions.

Thus, Ellen's withdrawal from the point of tension and her pleasure in her work prevented the relationship from being disrupted by excessive wear, allowed her to recover from the wear and from James himself, rescued the fulfillment of the mission, and maintained the marriage bond that lasted until James's death.¹¹¹

*Confidences to Lucinda Hall*¹¹²

Another aspect to be considered is Ellen's confidences in her letters to Lucinda Hall. Relationship theorists point out that conflict is an integral part of any relational situation.¹¹³ However, proper management of it prevents it from

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹A few weeks later (by the end of May 1876), they were together again and very busy writing, traveling, and preaching at camp meetings in Kansas, Missouri, and Iowa ([E. G. White] to Dear Children, Willie and Mary, 28 May 1876 [Letter 30, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 3:37). The work demanded so much of them, as pointed out by Ellen, "I find when the entire burden of labor rests on your Father and myself, we do not find time and have not strength to write even letters" ([E. G. White] to [Willie], 7 June 1876 [Letter 31a, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; cf. idem to Dear Children, Edson and Emma, 7 June 1876 [Letter 31, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD). When they finally arrived in Battle Creek at the beginning of July, they were "debilitated and run down like an old clock" (idem to Dear Children, 7 July 1876 [Letter 33, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 3:42). However, the meetings brought them "such satisfaction" they had never felt before in other camp meetings (E. G. White to Dear Children, Willie and Mary, 11 July 1876 [Letter 34, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 3:42).

¹¹²E. G. White considered Lucinda a "twin sister indeed in Christ" (E. G. White to Dear Husband, 17 July 1874 [Letter 44, 1874], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 3; cf. idem to Dear Lucinda, 14 July 1875 [Letter 48, 1875], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2–3), "more than a sister" (idem to Dear Sister Lucinda, my More than Sister," 20 October 1874 [Letter 72, 1874], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD), and a "confidential companion" (idem to Dear Husband, 25 March 1876 [Letter 63, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2).

¹¹³Pedro Cunha, "A Diversidade de Práticas na Relação entre Gênero, Conflito e Negociação," *Revista da Faculdade de Ciências Humanas e Sociais da Universidade*

progressing to break up or violence. In this way, all relationships can last in the presence of conflict, including those that God has chosen for his work.

Certainly, once again, the idealization of heroes and pioneers of a community prevents their followers from accepting their humanity and imperfection. As a human being under stress because of the conflict, Ellen made use of her temporary absence from James as a strategy for stress relief. Moreover, she discussed the problem, so that verbalization could bring her release from the stress.

According to Vygotsky, humans are formed by sharing with each other through speech. This sharing can produce reframing of the issues that cause psychological distress, assisting in problem resolution. Since the human being is understood in Vygotskian psychology as an integral being, one cannot separate emotions from information and practice. Thus, speech (in a cultural-historical sense, understood in any of its verbal and nonverbal forms) allows sharing of emotions or problems and can bring relief to the individual.¹¹⁴

In addition, the “zone of proximal development” is defined in cultural-historical psychology as the difference between what an individual can accomplish alone and what he or she can do with the help of another who is more capable.¹¹⁵ As said, in the theoretical proposal used here, the development of the individual cannot be fragmented. Therefore, in the absence of a trained professional, a trusted person who is not part of the problem and has social skills can provide a suffering person with relief by listening and sharing, as in Ellen’s case. Thus, the letters from Ellen to Lucinda, as well as the conversations they had when they met, were providential opportunities for Ellen during a time of conflict—not only desired, but recommended, since isolation, theoretically, does not provide the progress that sharing offers. Ellen’s attitude can be considered desirable and beneficial for her, as it eased her tensions and helped her to deal with the problem.

Furthermore, Lucinda had access to the Whites’ house and was close to the couple for many years; she was a Christian friend with whom Ellen talked about her problems and was likely aware of the situation that was exacerbated by James’s disease. Ellen wrote, “You knew when you left there was no one I could speak with, however distressed I might be.”¹¹⁶ As this was not new to Lucinda and did not hurt the secrecy of the couple, Ellen did not infringe on any of her ethical values, especially since the content of the letters did not address intimate matters. So, her sporadic trips away, her involvement in work activities, and her letters to Lucinda constituted Ellen’s therapeutic strategy to help herself during the crisis.

Fernando Pessoa 5 (2008): 266–279; Pedro Cunha and Carla Lopes, “Cidadania na Gestão de Conflitos: A Negociação na, para e com a Mediação?” *Antropológicas* 12 (2011): 38–43.

¹¹⁴Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*, passim.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹⁶E. G. White to Dear Sister Lucinda, 17 May 1876 (Letter 67, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; *idem*, *Daughters of God*, 271.

Thus, Ellen's care to request the destruction of the letters¹¹⁷ can be considered as simply Victorian caution. According to correspondence manuals of the time, private letters were never to be accessed by the public. So, this was not due to their content, which Lucinda knew already from spending time at the Whites' house, but to social ethics.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, by failing to destroy the letters, Lucinda did not honor the trust of her friend and allowed the public a look into her domestic affairs, when Ellen, following the Bible's counsel (1 Cor 12:25; Gal 6:2), was just looking for a shoulder to cry on.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, Lucinda's attitude allowed future generations to see that men and women of God are vulnerable to universal human problems; and those who read these letters can take comfort in the knowledge that, just like the prophets of the past, who were sure of God's call, everyone can legitimately seek help and fulfill the mission entrusted to them, no matter the difficulties in which they find themselves.

Promoting Factors of James and Ellen White's Marriage

This study identified several promoting factors or potential promoters of James and Ellen's marriage. Some of them are ambivalent factors—those that, depending on the time or circumstances of the individual disposition, can have “positive valence,” functioning as promotion, or “negative valence,” acting as a barrier.¹²⁰ Some of these factors have already been mentioned when discussing the other categories, so we will only mention them briefly to characterize them.

Working Together

This promotion factor appears in the letters and is the positive valence of working with family. Normally, a job superimposed on a marriage can take first place in the life of one spouse, or both, and separate the conjugal group or dissolve it by abandonment. However, in the case of the Whites, their joined work functioned as a uniting factor.

It was a barrier and source of tension at times when they could not accompany each other or when James tried to exercise control over Ellen's work. But, most of the time, their work was the dominant meaning and

¹¹⁷Idem, Letter 67, 1876, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 264.

¹¹⁸Lystra, 2009.

¹¹⁹These letters were found in an old trunk that was acquired by Susan Jaquete, and finally came to belong to the White Estate in 1973. The collection contained about 2000 letters of which 39 were written by Ellen White and some by James White (A. L. White, “Ellen White Letters Discovered in Historical Collection,” *RH* 150.33 [1973]: 1, 10–11; Paul Gordon and Ron Graybill, “Letters to Lucinda: Excerpts from the Ellen White Messages Found in the Newly Discovered Collection,” *RH* 150.34 [1973]: 4–7; E. G. White, *Daughters of God*, 264).

¹²⁰*Valence* is a term used in psychology (translated to the German *valenz*, used by Lewin) in discussing emotional attractiveness [positive] or aversiveness [negative] (Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts*, 59, 60, 135, 155).

organizer of other meanings present in the life of the couple. Working together gave them company, converging mutual interests, shared achievement, and a feeling of teamwork.¹²¹

Mutual Appreciation: Respect, Affection, and Admiration

Another promoting factor in the Whites' relationship was their mutual appreciation. This element is evident in the respect they each had for the skills or gifts of the other, as well as their affection and mutual admiration. James particularly respected Ellen as a prophet, although he disagreed with some of her private opinions.¹²² He maintained his conviction about Ellen's prophetic gift even during the critical periods of his disease.¹²³ Ellen, in turn, praised James's writing ability and preaching, his potential future in the mission, and his past accomplishments in those areas.¹²⁴ Thus, mutual appreciation strengthened the group, satisfying their need for recognition and bringing them closer as a marriage group.¹²⁵

The Whites' Religious Worldview

The third promoting factor present in the letters was the religious worldview of the Whites. They lived with extraordinary conviction in the message they embraced. They feared that they would fail in the mission if one weakened the influence of the other or if they failed to do all the good they could in the time they had. They expected the imminent return of Jesus; James felt that God had commissioned him to be next to Ellen (in addition to being the husband and supporter of the prophetess); and she believed that God had special work to do through both of them. Even during relationship crises, their religious worldview and their individual and joined prayers worked to reinforce their marriage ties as they wished to resume the work they believed God had given them. In this sense, their religious belief—that they were in the world on a mission for God—gave extra meaning to their marriage.

¹²¹“Many of the pioneers, who shared with us these trials and victories, remained true till the close of life, and have fallen asleep in Jesus. Among these is *the faithful warrior who for thirty-six years stood by my side in the battle for truth*. God used him as a teacher and leader to stand in the front ranks during the severe struggles of those early days of the message; but he has fallen at his post, and, with others who have died in the faith, he awaits the coming of the Lifegiver, who will call him from his gloomy prison-house to a glorious immortality” (E. G. White, “Notes of Travel: The Cause in Vermont,” *RH* 60.46 [1883]: 721 [emphasis supplied]).

¹²²Cf. idem, Letter 66, 1876, 2–3 (in idem, *Daughters of God*, 268–270).

¹²³J. White, *A Solemn Appeal*; idem, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1878), passim; idem, *The Spirit of Prophecy or Perpetuity and Object of the Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1880), passim.

¹²⁴E. G. [White], Letter 38, 1874, 2; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:433.

¹²⁵Lewin, “Conflict in Marriage,” 95.

Mutual Complementation

The fourth promotion factor was the complementation of the couple. Their temperaments were different, but their talents and roles in the marital relationship complemented each other. James was the leader, a strong personality, tireless organizer, entrepreneur, and excellent writer and speaker. Ellen was naturally shy, but also a strong-willed woman¹²⁶ and had the gift of prophecy. James was her counselor and took the position of supporting her in the transmission of her messages. Ellen recognized this mutual dependency:

God has a great work for him and me. We shall have strength to perform it.¹²⁷

Father, I fear, would not do as well if I should leave him. We ought to labor unitedly together.¹²⁸

After the death of her husband, she penned:

I miss Father more and more. Especially do I feel his loss while here in the mountains. . . . I am fully of the opinion that my life was so entwined or interwoven with my husband's that it is about impossible for me to be of any great account without him.¹²⁹

But how I miss him! How I long for his words of counsel and wisdom! How I long to hear his prayers blending with my prayers for light and guidance, for wisdom to know how to plan and lay out the work!¹³⁰

Thus, one completed the other in married life and mission.

The Accession of James to the Ideals of the Couple and His Repentance

James's commitment to their marital ideals stands out, as discussed above, in several ways. First, he was committed to the mission as an important meaning for the couple, and contributed to the marriage team as an adding factor to the relationship.¹³¹ Second, he respected the prophetic gift of his wife and firmly believed he had been chosen to be at Ellen's side in her prophetic ministry, playing a dual role in the marital relationship as husband and prophetess supporter. This role of supporter was an additional sacred meaning of their marriage and an element that could strengthen the group.¹³² Third, he showed an attitude of humble repentance and sought reconciliation with God in his letters of apology for ignoring the warnings of his wife regarding his physical and spiritual health. This humble and conciliatory attitude reaffirmed the marital bond, during and after the critical period of James's disease. Therefore,

¹²⁶Knight, *Walking with Ellen White*, 72.

¹²⁷E. G. White, Letter 19, 1877, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 273.

¹²⁸Idem, Letter 27, 1874, 3; A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:430.

¹²⁹E. G. White to Dear Son Willie, 22 September 1881 (Letter 17, 1881), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; idem, *Daughters of God*, 273.

¹³⁰Idem to My dear sister Robinson, 27 November 1899 (Letter 196, 1899), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem, *Daughters of God*, 274.

¹³¹Lewin, "Conflict in Marriage," 95–98.

¹³²Ibid.

James's adherence to their ideals and his humble repentance were promoter elements of their marital relationship.

Ellen's Personality

Most of the letters from Ellen to James reveal the dynamics of the relationship and their roles within the marriage. Again, the nineteenth-century culture, in which the man assumed the dominant role in the relationship, is evident in the content of the letters written by Ellen. It is important to mention that she wrote frequently to him; for a period of forty-five days, in 1876, she did it almost every day, although James did not respond with the same frequency.¹³³

Ellen's personality is evident in the letters. Taking a random sample of eight letters¹³⁴ written during a period of tension when they were working in separate places, five aspects stand out: submission, humility, affection, an attitude of reconciliation, and concern for James.

Submission

The first trait of Ellen's personality that appears in these letters is submission. This is evident because Ellen was careful in telling James where she was going, what she was doing, and whom she was with. She gave reports of her daily activities; waited for his "orders" to make household decisions; and informed him who was accompanying her in her trips and activities. The letters continually say that she was accompanied by women or relatives, working on her writings or praying for him, and, in one of them, she assured him that she was not using her freedom more than necessary: "In regard to my independence, I have had no more than I should have in the matter under the circumstances. I do not receive your views or interpretation of my feelings on this matter."¹³⁵

Thus, Ellen indicated her independence, but the letters emphasize that this referred to her mission. She mentioned in one letter that she was about "to remain in California and do my writings" and later wrote, "I would not allow anyone to call me from my work." However, in the same paragraph, when the subject changed to the purchase of a horse or carriage for the couple's use, she waited for James's decision. While Ellen thought she was entitled to it, she

¹³³From 31 March to 16 May 1876, there are thirty-one letters addressed to James White (Letters 1, 1a, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 16a, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 25a, 26, 27, 63). She even apologized for being too repetitive: "Dear Husband: I expect you will get wearied with my letters. There is such a sameness in them" ([E. G. White] to Dear Husband, 28 April 1876 [Letter 16, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD 1).

¹³⁴All of the following were from 1876: Letter 3 (4 April), 5 (11 April), 7 (14 April), 9 (18 April), 11 (20 April), 16 (28 April), 25 (12 May), and 27 (16 May).

¹³⁵Idem to Dear Husband, 12 May 1876 (Letter 25, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2.

asked her husband's opinion, looking for his approval, as well as in relation to other matters, as follows:

I think it is due myself to have some of these privileges. What do you think?¹³⁶

In reference to furnishing [the] new house, please send in your orders as to what furniture you want and your wishes shall be complied with. It is your house and of course you have the right to say how it shall be furnished. . . . In regard to our pictures, how many shall we order[?] . . . Everyone thinks [that] these last from Dunham's are perfect. What is your judgment?¹³⁷

In regard to publishing my book here, what do you think of it? The manuscript could at once be put in the hands of the printers. Will you please inform us in reference to this.¹³⁸

Yesterday prepared matter from my book for the Signs. Now please tell me, Shall I give a full relation of our experience in the eastern fanaticism and shall I give particulars of cases that were healed?¹³⁹

Therefore, her independence, in harmony with other statements, refers to her work as a prophetess, but the letters contain elements of submission from Ellen to James in other aspects of life. Graybill argues that Ellen would "emerge as the dominant figure in the home and an independent leader in the church" in the last fifteen years of their marriage, which he attributes to the change of roles due to James's illness.¹⁴⁰ Thus, agreeing with the analysis of this author, this independence must refer only to her work, as the relationship between patient and caregiver is one of care and not of domination.

Domination, in literature, is seen as an asymmetry in gender relations, cultural and naturalized, but that was not Ellen's posture after James's disease. The periods of James's illness required the addition of new roles, and Ellen, the wife, now also became the caregiver.

In the analysis of the central meaning of the Whites' marriage, we have seen that, even during James's illness, Ellen kept a submissive attitude,

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Idem, Letter 3, 1876, 3–4; cf. idem to Dear Husband, 24 March 1876 (Letter 1a, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1; idem to Dear Husband, 16 April 1876 (Letter 8, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem, Letter 14, 1876; idem to Dear Husband, 31 April 1876 (Letter 17, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem to Dear Husband, 5 May 1876 (Letter 21 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

¹³⁸Idem to Dear Husband, 8 April 1876 (Letter 4a, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

¹³⁹Idem to Dear Husband, 1 May 1876 (Letter 20, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD. She then gives her own opinion, but reemphasizes that she honors her husband's views, and adds, "Please write something in regard to the matter. We want you to state your views freely" (ibid.). Some days later she continued asking for his advice on the best way of writing her autobiography, "I would be glad to hear some expression from you in reference to the *Signs*. How do you like the way we are getting out my life? What do you think of it?" (idem, Letter 21, 1876; cf. idem to Dear Husband, 10 May 1876 [Letter 23, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD).

¹⁴⁰Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy," 25.

declaring her independence only for two interconnected reasons: matters of conscience and compliance with her prophetic mission.¹⁴¹ In addition, the data characterizes the relationship of the Whites as a complementary partnership that was important for the fulfillment of the mission. James's disease awakened in him a desire to control Ellen,¹⁴² but we do not have sufficient data to determine whether Ellen wished to control James, despite her independence in traveling and working alone.

As she explained, submission was part of her conception of marriage, except in matters of conscience: "We women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. He is the head and our judgment and views and reasonings must agree with his if possible. If not, the preference in God's Word is given to the husband where it is not a matter of conscience. We must yield to the head."¹⁴³

Ellen did not understand submission as associated with circumstantial reasons, but as a biblical principle. To give up this principle would be a self-contradiction, an incoherence that is not identified as we refine and expand the analysis of the data. Her independence was, therefore, limited to her prophetic mission, given by God and superior to the husband's authority.¹⁴⁴

Ellen excepted herself from submission in matters of "conscience" because she considered it a "duty" for the cause, for which she should not submit to her husband, since he could not accompany her. Once again, we see the centrality of the mission as the dominant meaning in the life of the couple, which supported Ellen's freedom and independence—not independence from the marriage, but to fulfill the purpose of both their lives, which continued even after the death of James.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:431–432.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 2:431.

¹⁴³E. G. White to Dear Sister Mary [Loughborough], 6 June 1861 (Letter 5, 1861), *Ellen G. White Estate*, Silver Spring, MD, 2 (quoted in A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:431).

¹⁴⁴As admitted in the qualitative research, the human being is a complex object of study whose experience cannot be defined in a simplified manner. Many simultaneous conflicts are identified in human experience through research in the humanities. People can deal simultaneously with their past, their multiple collections and roles, their ideals and values, often under subjective and relational conflict, without it necessarily meaning contradiction. The harmony with the biblical ideal is a continuous walking, which often coexists with ambiguous and ambivalent situations, searching for an experience closer to the ideal. Without denying the biblical ideal, accepted by her, of essential equality and mutual respect and cooperation between men and women, the declared marital experience of Ellen White has (as in all human beings) this complexity. Thus men and women can and must move towards the ideal of equality in mutual cooperation, despite having to live with the peculiarities of sinful world. The ideal of equality is for everyone in the world and in the church, but even in the church, sometimes, we see the tension between the ideal and our practice, due to the imperfection brought by sin. The authors believe that Ellen White was not immune to this strain.

¹⁴⁵Cf. E. G. White, *Daughters of God*, 274.

Humility

Another aspect of Ellen's personality that appears in the letters is her humility in the face of their marital tensions that were due to James's temperament and disease. She repeatedly apologized for worrying him, although she was disapproving of behavior that he himself would later recognize as wrong.¹⁴⁶ She apologized for letting a day pass without writing to him, and her arguments always had a conciliatory tone due to the marital tensions.

Need for Affection

A third aspect evidenced in the letters is Ellen's need for affection. She clearly mentioned that she needed his support, and complained that he did not respond and give his opinions about her feelings, asking him to write her. Then, she wrote about her sadness and need for affection that she fulfilled in God and explained that she missed James. However, Ellen put the mission God gave her first.

Concern for James

The fourth aspect of Ellen's personality in the marital relationship that stands out is her concern for James's health. She revealed that she was "anxiously waiting" to hear from him,¹⁴⁷ "very sad" that he was sick,¹⁴⁸ and "so glad" when she received news that her husband was fine.¹⁴⁹ She asked for prayers for her "dear husband" to be strengthened physically and to have a clearer mind. The theme is also present in her letter of outburst to Lucinda Hall: "How is James' health? I had a dream that troubled me in reference to James."¹⁵⁰ This concern for her husband's health was always present in Ellen's messages to him, particularly due to his overwork and disease.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶Cf. A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:426–429.

¹⁴⁷E. G. White, Letter 5, 1876, 1.

¹⁴⁸Idem to Dear Husband, 18 April 1876 (Letter 9, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 2; idem, Letter 11, 1876, 1.

¹⁴⁹Idem to Dear Husband, 14 April 1876 (Letter 7, 1876), Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD, 1.

¹⁵⁰Idem, Letter 66, 1876, 4.

¹⁵¹Cf. A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*, 2:426–429. "We have felt some anxious in regard to your health on account of the change of climate at this season of the year. It must be trying to your system, but we hope you will take the best of care of yourself, that your health may not suffer. I hope that this journey will be indeed to you a season of rest rather than toil. I shall press through my work as fast as possible. We pray every day and many times through the day that God would guide you in judgment, [and] impart to you heavenly wisdom. We believe that He will do for us the things we ask of Him" (E. G. White to Dear Husband, 11 April 1876 [Letter 5, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; cf. idem to Dear Husband, 12 April 1876 [Letter 6, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD; idem to Dear Husband, 14 April 1876 [Letter 7, 1876], Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD).

Conciliatory Attitude

The final aspect is her conciliatory attitude. During the crisis, Ellen showed a consistent conciliatory attitude toward the tensions generated by James's behavior. In her letters to him there are no attacks, accusations, or even personal deprecations. Ellen preserved and supported her husband, even when she disagreed with him, and asked for his opinion, as in the case of her independence to work; she mentioned waiting "anxiously" for his answers. She also asked him "please" to write something about the things in her letter¹⁵² and revealed that she would be sad if she had "said or written anything" that grieved, annoyed, or distressed James. She expressed concern for "differences to separate [their] feelings," admitted that she was wrong, apologized, and promised to never say or write anything that could disturb him.¹⁵³ So Ellen played an important role in the conciliatory mood of the couple.

Thus, Ellen can be described as a submissive, humble, and conciliatory wife who recognized her needs and made them explicit to her husband, but found relief in the spiritual life through faith and prayer and constantly cared for the health of her husband. These characteristics point to her acceptance of James, even during the tensions, which created a stable psychological ground for both in the relationship.¹⁵⁴ However, Ellen dared not tie herself to her husband to the point of giving up their ideal of living for the mission. Thus, the submissive Ellen in the relationship was also the independent Ellen, moderator and promoter of her marriage, never denying or compromising it, even during the most difficult times.

Synthesis of These Meanings in the Conjugal Life of the Couple

As we have seen, this research, based on a qualitative approach with cultural-historical psychology as its theoretical framework, used Bardin's analysis of content, referenced in Lewin's theory, which understands marriage as working within group dynamics. Despite the limitations, given the breadth of the theme, the research answered the question about the meanings the Whites built for their marriage, based on documents they produced. Also, the proposed objectives in understanding the marital relationship of the Whites in the context of the nineteenth-century were satisfactorily met: (1) to describe and analyze the meanings and practices of the marital

¹⁵²Idem, Letter 5, 1876.

¹⁵³Idem, Letter 27, 1876. "We are living in a most solemn time and we cannot afford to have in our old age differences to separate our feelings. I may not view all things as you do, but I do not think it would be my place or duty to try to make you see as I see and feel as I feel. Wherein I have done this, I am sorry. . . . I do not claim infallibility, or even perfection of Christian character. I am not free from mistakes and errors in my life. Had I followed my Saviour more closely, I should not have to mourn so much my unlikeness to His dear image. . . . No more shall a line be traced by me or expression made in my letters to distress you. Again, I say forgive me, every word or act that has grieved you" (ibid., 1).

¹⁵⁴Lewin, "Conflict in Marriage," 85–86.

relationship of the Whites present in the documents produced by the couple, and (2) to identify consistencies or inconsistencies between the speech and practice of the couple with regard to their marital life.

The data present in the documents examined were organized into three thematic blocks. First, was the dominant meaning of the Whites' marriage. It was possible to identify that the relationship of the Whites, though possessing some common characteristics of the nineteenth-century marriages, did not fit the romanticism of the time, as indicated by the meanings present in the letters. They did not emphasize intimate love leaning toward passion and eroticism, for example. However, the data show no complaints of a sexual nature or conflicts in other areas of life together that would mean dysfunctionality in the relationship.

Still, in the first block, the meanings that appear in the data point to a couple whose dominant meaning was the mission of proclaiming the Advent message, and who, in carrying out that mission, found their *raison d'être* as individuals and as a conjugal couple. The mission thus functioned as the organizational basis and meaning of the White couple, as can be seen throughout their history, in biographical and autobiographical works.

The second thematic block organizes the main barriers of the marital relationship into two types: (1) James's personality and his disease, and (2) Ellen's independence. The first barrier was that James's strong and controlling personality was changed by the succession of strokes and became an element that contributed to tension and conflict. The disease acted as a breakdown in the couple's path, leading to a transition in which actions in search of balance affected the dynamics of the couple and their immediate setting, involving friends and co-workers.

In the process, both James and Ellen experienced significant losses. In the case of James, it was an emphasis on "unsatisfied need" or "the state of hunger," meaning he felt empty because of the limitations the disease imposed on his ability to work and exert control, as well as the withdrawal of the mission as the central meaning of his life. In this respect, work for the couple was an ambivalent factor because, while it united them, in excess, it became a barrier in the relationship.

James's behavior worsened in a behavior-illness-behavior cycle, creating progressive tension in the marriage group. Thus, the Whites lived a crisis that went beyond the purely medical explanation. However, James and Ellen, as individuals and as a couple, kept intact the core aspects of their religion and marital relationship, controlling and reducing the level of tension in search of stability, and emphasizing functionality in the relationship.

The other identified barrier was the independence of Ellen. It was also an ambivalent element that functioned to create distance in time of crisis. Her freedom to act caused tension in her relations with James, but, at the same time, allowed her to take the initiative to do things that relieved tension and led to reconciliation.

The second theme points to several prominent factors or potential promoters of the relationship: (1) their work together; (2) mutual appreciation:

respect, affection, and mutual admiration; (3) a common religious worldview; (4) a complementary relationship; (5) the accession of James to the ideals of the couple and his repentance; and (6) Ellen's personality, which functioned as a consistently conciliatory element of the relationship.

The Whites appear in the data analyzed in the text as a couple united by the mission. Despite the difficulties inherent in conjugality, the trajectory of the couple shows the functionality of the relationship along the marital career to the end. Throughout their married life, they adopted strategies that seemed more appropriate for them to remain united and fulfill the purpose they believed God had given them. In this sense, it was a couple that fought the good fight as best as they could.

It can be concluded, in summary, that the Whites can be described as a functional pair who faced marital conflicts in some phases of their career. These conflicts are understood as elements inherent in the developmental process of groups and individuals, which did not affect the central aspects of their marriage. The Whites' lives were consistent with their values, beliefs, and ideals, and they presented meanings of accomplishment and mutual satisfaction in their lifetime trajectory, as a conjugal group and as individuals.