

**ELLEN G. WHITE AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS AS REPAIR FOR SLAVERY:
BASIS FOR THINKING ABOUT QUOTAS AND THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL
JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS**

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ESCRAVIDÃO: BASES PARA SE PENSAR AS COTAS E OS DESAFIOS DA JUSTIÇA
SOCIAL EM AMBIENTES EDUCACIONAIS***

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ESCLAVITUD: BASES PARA PENSAR EN LAS CUOTAS Y LOS DESAFÍOS DE LA
JUSTICIA SOCIAL EN LOS ENTORNOS EDUCATIVOS***



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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to be an interdisciplinary exercise in education, law, and theology, using the affirmative measures in Brazil as a parameter for reflection based on the writings of Ellen G. White. In her work, among other religious and social themes, access to education is reported as an essential factor for rectifying injustices caused by slavery and still suffered by descendants today. This documentary-type research will highlight similarities between the concepts explored by White in her context and affirmative measures as understood by parts of the current Brazilian academy, especially represented by the São Paulo School of Racial Discussions. Ultimately, it results in an attempt to bring the discussion of social justice into an environment that considers religion as part of its discursive and analytical foundations, enabling the contemplation of educational quotas within such logic and intricacies.

KEYWORDS: Education. Seventh-day Adventist Church. Racism. Public Policies. Public Theology. Slavery.

RESUMO: *O presente trabalho se propõe a ser um exercício interdisciplinar entre Educação, Direito e Teologia, usando como parâmetro para reflexão das medidas afirmativas no Brasil os escritos da norte-americana Ellen G. White (1827-1915). Em sua obra, dentro outras tantas temáticas religiosas e sociais, o acesso à educação é relatado como um fator de desenvolvimento indispensável para corrigir injustiças provocadas pela escravização e ainda hoje sofridas pelos descendentes. De natureza documental, a pesquisa identificará pontos de similaridade entre os conceitos explorados por White em seu contexto e as medidas afirmativas tal como são compreendidas atualmente por parte da academia brasileira, especialmente representada pela Escola Paulista de discussões raciais. Obtém-se como resultado uma tentativa de trazer a discussão sobre justiça social para um ambiente que considere a religião como parte de suas bases discursivas e analíticas, possibilitando se pensar as cotas no contexto educacionais.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Educação. Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia. Racismo. Teologia Pública. Escravidão.*

RESUMEN: *Este trabajo pretende ser un ejercicio interdisciplinario entre Educación, Derecho y Teología, utilizando los escritos de la norteamericana Elena G. de White (1827-1915) como parámetro para la reflexión sobre las medidas afirmativas en Brasil. En su obra, entre muchos otros temas religiosos y sociales, el acceso a la educación se presenta como un factor de desarrollo indispensable para corregir las injusticias causadas por la esclavitud y que aún hoy sufren sus descendientes. De carácter documental, la investigación señalará puntos de similitud entre los conceptos explorados por White en su contexto y las medidas afirmativas tal como las entiende la academia brasileña actual, especialmente representada por la Escola Paulista de las discusiones raciales. El resultado es un intento de llevar la discusión sobre justicia social a un entorno que considera la religión como parte de sus bases discursivas y analíticas, posibilitando pensar las cuotas en el contexto educativo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educación. Racismo. Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día. Teología pública. Esclavitud.*

Introduction

The implementation of affirmative action in Brazil is surrounded by controversies, especially when they involve ethnic criteria. This is not a recent debate (Bell, 1992; Alexander, 2010; Du Bois, 1935). Discussions on the legitimacy of racial quotas aimed at the inclusion of Afro-descendants in higher education and public service positions have intensified since the first decade of the 2000s, eliciting various reactions.

Quotas can be defined as "public policies aimed at addressing social groups that are in conditions of disadvantage or social vulnerability due to historical, cultural, and economic factors" (Fonseca, 2009, p. 11, our translation). These measures are intended as historical reparations for the wrongs perpetrated against Black people and Indigenous populations through enslavement, exploitation, and the consequent condition of subordination.

Those who support affirmative measures serve to "correct structural inequalities by means of measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities for members of vulnerable social groups" (Vaz, 2022, p. 22, our translation). Their applicability to Black Brazilians is based on the premise that, after abolition, the freed individuals were not assisted with their needs. Freedom from enslavement did not bring with it integration into society and the market. Opponents of quotas, however, argue that the complexity of ethnic-racial relations in Brazil does not allow for a precise demarcation of who would be disadvantaged after more than a century since abolition. Additionally, they believe that miscegenation has flattened the landscape of poverty, making race an inadequate criterion to explain the lack of opportunities. From this perspective, reserving spots would violate the principle of isonomy, which should guide public actions (Magnoli, 2009; Rajagopalan, 2012).

The issue of Afro-Brazilians has been gaining increasing attention in academia. Within the scope of education, ethnic issues have received more prominence with Law No. 11.645/08, which mandates elementary and high schools to include Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture in their curricula, expanding on Laws No. 9.394/96 and No. 10.639/03. Additionally, the evaluation tool for higher education courses, implemented by MEC/INEP in 2017, requires higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure these topics are taught at least in an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary manner.

In the educational and religious context, this relationship was also discussed by the American Ellen G. White (1827-1915). A Christian writer and co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Knight, 2017; Darius, 2021; Fortin; Moon, 2018), she dedicated many pages to racial discussions, as will be noted throughout this work. Her writings address access to

education as a necessary factor for rectifying the injustices suffered by the descendants of enslaved people, the potential of education to promote social mobility, and various aspects concerning the logic of education itself. Although she did not consider herself a teacher or educator, the significance of her works, such as the book “*Education*,” originally published in 1903, is evident from her influence on the development of the Adventist educational network, which currently serves millions of students worldwide.

One of the reasons for discussing the fight against racism through religious writings lies in the importance of religion in contemporary social life, as well as the significant impact that theological conceptions have had on the creation, maintenance, and combat of racism, including their influence on abolition. For example, Christians played a prominent role in fighting slavery in England and the United States (Malheiros; Boechat, 2021, p. 69-91). Although abolition in Brazil had a “strictly secular character” (Rocha, 2009, p. 73, our translation), members of the Quaker and Methodist movements, who were leaders in combating racism in their home countries, also inspired the Brazilian abolitionist movement.

If people of faith used religious values to work against slavery, it is expected that the involvement of people of faith can still be helpful today in the implementation of policies aimed at correcting the harms caused by past incarceration. Defending and formulating reparative policies seems to be a contemporary consequence of these abolitionist movements led by Protestant Christians in the past. As we will see throughout the research, there are significant similarities between White's views and the current concept of affirmative action with a racial focus. This suggests that theology can play an important role in raising awareness and responding to racial issues in Brazil. The problem of the present study can be defined through the following question to be addressed: how can Ellen G. White's writings on social justice and education inform and influence the implementation of affirmative action policies in contemporary Brazil?

Methodology

In developing this work, a methodology was adopted that connects the fields of education, law, and theology/religion to examine affirmative measures in Brazil, using the writings of Ellen G. White as a point of reflection. The research was conducted under a comparative historical research approach and memory studies, as discussed by Jacques Le Goff (1996).

Such studies played a crucial role in analyzing the narratives and historical representations of race, education, and religion in White's writings. This methodological aspect was essential to understanding how collective memory has influenced (and could still influence) contemporary public policies and public perception of affirmative measures. Additionally, the research incorporated an analysis of the theological implications in the debates on racism and historical reparation. It examined how religious beliefs have shaped discussions on racial equity and social inclusion, both in the past and present. By utilizing White's texts, the research illustrated how religious conceptions can both support and challenge affirmative action policies.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study not only drew parallels between White's ideas and modern affirmative action practices but also highlighted the interaction between memory, history, and theology in the formulation of educational and racial inclusion policies in Brazil. This comparative and integrated method provided a richer and more nuanced understanding of the complex debates surrounding affirmative action as a means of redressing the harms of slavery.

Thus, the text will unfold into a multifaceted analysis that interlinks Christianity and racial relations in Brazil, starting from the divergences between the Bahian and Paulista schools, to the contemporary implications of these theories on affirmative action policies and the social interpretation of race. In doing so, we can explore the significant role of education as a tool for social mobility, illustrated by historical and current initiatives within different Christian currents, highlighting figures such as Arlindo Veiga dos Santos and the educational contributions of the Adventists.

The discussion extends to examining theological responses to affirmative action policies, contrasting progressive and conservative views. Furthermore, it addresses the legacy of abolitionism, emphasizing Ellen G. White's perspective on reparations for slavery as a Christian imperative. Finally, the study concludes with a reflection on the current engagement of churches, especially the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA), in combating racism, highlighting how it is possible to be agents of social change through education and the promotion of racial justice.

To adequately detail the methodology employed in this study, it is important to clarify the sequential process and techniques used in analyzing the writings of Ellen G. White and their applicability to affirmative action policies in Brazil. Initially, an extensive literature review on affirmative action and White's writings was conducted, focusing particularly on her perspectives on social justice and education. This review included both primary sources,

White's original texts, observed and researched from the Ellen G. White Estate website⁴, and secondary sources, encompassing contemporary analyses of her work and its theological and educational implications.

Next, a comparative historical research approach was adopted to draw parallels between White's ideas and contemporary affirmative action policies. This involved constructing an analytical matrix that allowed for comparing the principles White advocated with current legislation and practices in Brazil, examining the convergences and divergences. This matrix was crucial in understanding how historical theological conceptions can influence modern public policies. This interdisciplinary method provided a deep understanding of the dynamics between historical memory, theology, and educational policies in the context of affirmative action.

Christianity and the Interpretation of Racial Relations in Brazil

In this section, we will reflect on the thoughts and positions of the two main Brazilian schools in the study of the racial situation in Brazil, the so-called Bahian and Paulista schools. "While the former demonstrated the growing importance of racism in Brazil, the latter adhered to the creed of Brazilian racial democracy" (Guimarães, 2009, p. 77, our translation). These contrasting emphases result from profound "theoretical, methodological, and interpretative divergences" (Guimarães, 2009, p. 77, our translation).

Having Gilberto Freyre as its major representative, the Bahian school understands that Brazilian social relations were porous, allowing for the social ascension of blacks even amidst slavery. The histories of prominent Afro-Brazilian figures and the *mestizaje* of the population, resulting from interracial relationships that occurred long before abolition, are cited as evidence of this more flexible character of racial relations in Brazil, which would not necessarily relegate blacks to a condition of subalternity inherent to their race. Enthusiasts of this idea argue that inequality is a matter of class, not race (Guimarães, p. 88-89). One of the critics of affirmative measures in Brazil, the jurist Ibsen Noronha, adheres to this perspective. Active in combating quotas, he defends the view that racial harmony can be seen in the country even through the slave legislation of the Empire (Gomes, 2023). Given this context, the rise of ideas opposing the presence of blacks in Brazilian society post-abolition is practically ignored by these interpreters.

⁴ Available at: <https://egwwritings.org>.

On the other hand, the Paulista school, represented by the thoughts of the patron of Brazilian sociology, Florestan Fernandes, draws attention to social inequality in the country as an inseparable phenomenon from ethnic relations. In addition to dealing with the consequences of captivity that lasted for over three centuries, the lack of a project for inclusion in society after abolition deprived blacks of the technical and social skills necessary to become competitive in free labor (Fernandes, 2007, p. 108). According to Fernandes (2007), the exclusion of blacks in Brazil demands "a national program aimed at the social dilemma of minorities who do not have the autonomous conditions to quickly solve the problems of their integration into the economic, social, and political order inherent to national society" (Fernandes, 2007, p. 52, our translation). Proponents of affirmative action follow this perspective (Guimarães, 2009, p. 100).

From the perspective of religion, this issue has been interpreted by Brazilian Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, through two main lenses. The position of Noronha, a conservative Catholic, represents the prevailing discourse among right-wing Christians. Resistant to progressivism, they have at least two reasons that help them resist the agendas proposed by this political spectrum: the flexibility of traditional moral values and the expectation of enrichment, which diminishes their interest in programs emphasizing income distribution or increased opportunities (Araújo, 2022, p. 92).

Curiously, however, another Catholic, also aligned with conservative currents in Brazil, was highly sensitive to the problems faced by blacks in Brazil. Arlindo Veiga dos Santos (1902-1978) was a Paulista intellectual with significant contributions to the black movement in the 1930s. Despite being traditionalist to the point of advocating for the return of the monarchical regime in Brazil, he understood the necessity of combating the racism that relegated the Afro-Brazilian population to conditions of penury. Access to education was fundamental in this process: "It is undeniable the importance that Arlindo Veiga dos Santos attributed to school education, as it constituted his passport out of the world of domestic or manual labor, allowing him to become a teacher throughout his life and to gain recognition for his intellectual work" (Malatian, 2015, p. 187, our translation).

As president of the Brazilian Black Front (FNB), Veiga dos Santos advocated for actions aimed at improving the living conditions of black people in São Paulo. Through the organization, it was "expected to prepare black individuals to face the injustices of the labor market" (Malatian, 2015, p. 191, our translation). This example reveals that the interpretation of the black issue in Brazil was not always synonymous with a progressive reading. Indeed, within the FNB, "Catholicism had an undeniable influence on the activities developed"

(Malatian, 2015, p. 147, our translation), highlighting the role of religion in formulating activities to combat racism in Brazil.

Veiga dos Santos's discourse and the work of the FNB were similar to that of black Catholic brotherhoods, which, even during the slave regime, played "a prominent role in enabling a social and political life for black people amidst the slave order, with education being a significant factor in these associative arrangements" (Vaz, 2022, p. 57, our translation). The emergence of these entities dates back to the 17th century. Participants "received not only spiritual but also material assistance" (Priore, 2021, p. 74-75, our translation). In Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and São Paulo, they were a form of organized black resistance that flourished within the church environment, which supported slavery, showing the ambivalent role of Christianity in Brazilian slavery (Jesus, 2022, p. 229-232). They functioned "as mutual aid organizations, very active in raising money for manumissions and in providing care during sickness and death of the members" (Priore, 2021, p. 74-75, our translation).

In Protestantism, a similar example is found in Pastor Agostinho José Pereira. Historical sources referring to him are economical in details, but it is known that he was a former enslaved person who, upon gaining freedom in 1846, devoted himself to preaching on the streets of Recife. His followers were black, numbering up to 300, and were literate. Education also seems to have been an essential part of his ministry, alongside the fight against slavery, the defense of the supremacy of Scripture in theological formation, and the denunciation of Catholicism as a false religion (Martins, 2021, p. 54-55).

Another author who moves in the same direction is the Presbyterian minister, Wadislau Martins Gomes. Although, like Veiga dos Santos, he is not necessarily supportive of race-based affirmative measures, Gomes aligns with the perspective that the need for reparations for the evils of slavery has not been sufficiently addressed.

The abolition of slavery in Brazil left to chance all those who produced the success of their masters. They were not asked for forgiveness for the crime of man's domination over man and the resulting miseries. Nor was compensation produced. [...] The ideal of the abolition of slavery, like all sinful oppression and prejudice, is ineffective because it is not done correctly. Liberation is fundamental. Its application, however, is ineffective because it is not truly free when it does not redeem the master from the shackles of the craving for power or redeem the slave from the suffered wrath and bitterness of miseries (Gomes, 2007, p. 220, our translation).

Baptist pastor Marco Davi de Oliveira not only believes that race-based affirmative measures are a way to redress these damages, but also calls for the engagement of the church

in the defense and promotion of these public policies. "Defending affirmative policies for blacks is to recognize the great racial differences existing in the country and to position oneself in favor of a future in which equality will effectively be real in Brazil" (Oliveira, 2015, p. 109, our translation). Three practical actions are suggested: (1) raising awareness about the condition of blacks in Brazil (Oliveira, 2015, p. 109), (2) urging Christian entrepreneurs to implement affirmative policies as a way to contribute "to dismantling a history of oppression and sin" (Oliveira, 2015, p. 112, our translation), and (3) promoting racial diversity in theological training institutions, providing space not only for black students, but also for black professors.

This engagement against racial issues in Brazil requires churches to overcome the "limits of a theoretical-practical action that is narcissistic in nature, escaping from reality [...] to make an insertion into the established social body" (Martins, 2021, p. 57-58, our translation). Combating racism in Brazil must involve the participation of all Christians outraged by the denigration of the image of God through the suffering of others, in this case, blacks. The promotion of affirmative measures, whether in the public or private sphere, is part of this action. The engagement of Adventism in this agenda is a rescue of exemplary actions from its history, as we will see next.

Who was Ellen White, and what was her importance to the discussion?

In the preface of his doctoral thesis, subsequently published as a book, Fábio Augusto Darius (2021, p. 12-13, our translation) wrote about Ellen G. White with the following words:

Ellen Gould Harmon White, born in 1827 in the American state of Maine, in the New England region of the United States of America, witnessed what is called the "century of History," the "long 19th century." White lived until precisely 1915, a year that saw the collapse of European developmental optimism – ending the belle époque – as it dragged its countries into the first modern world-spanning war. For the English historian Eric Hobsbawm, it was precisely this conflict that ended an era, sadly inaugurating the 20th century. This temporal framework, which constituted the existence of Ellen G. White – the nearly ninety years lived between 1827 and 1915 – was supremely important for the development of the United States, which experienced the first generation after the effective independence – the new struggle for independence – provided by the reaffirmation of victory over the English in 1776, in the War of 1812. Victorian, though not in theology, the author witnessed the zenith of that era in the United States, from the birth of the Monroe Doctrine and the first American attempts at hegemony over the American continent to their overseas commercial ventures; from the Civil War to the submission of the South to the North, with the victory of modern capitalism over colonial conservatism to the establishment of the first socialist group in that country in 1874; from the invention and popularization of the

telegraph in 1844 and the typewriter to the popularization of electric light, in old age. However, it was in the fertile religious field of that country, the triumphant history of Protestant progress – diverse in many ways from European religiosity and erected under a Puritan ideal of work and austerity – that she visualized the great transformations that would mark her life, attested by her prolific pen that, over more than 60 years of work, wrote and published quantitatively more than Calvin or Luther.

Ellen G. White, therefore, not only witnessed but also decisively intervened in the social transformations of her time, especially in the field of denominational education. As a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA), White stood out for her fervent advocacy of the role of education in social reform. Her vision of the importance of education was reflected in her works and teachings, where she often linked the care and education of the underprivileged to the moral and spiritual responsibility of religious institutions and the State. In White's words (2021, p. 160, our translation), "money should have been freely used in behalf of the care and education of them, at a time when their need was very great. But the government, after slight effort, left the colored people to struggle without help in their tremendous difficulties." This call to action highlights her criticism of governmental negligence and social indifference, reinforcing the need for active engagement from the private sector and religious institutions.

White accused the United States of allowing injustices to persist and of not doing enough for the reparations owed to enslaved people, a position she articulated vehemently, as emphasized by O'Reggio (2018, p. 874, our translation): "The author accused the country of allowing the existence of this terrible evil and holds it responsible for reparations to the slaves. She decisively rejected the prevailing theories on ethnic differences and affirmed the common humanity of all people." Through her speech and writing, Ellen G. White not only shaped Adventist educational practice but also made a significant contribution to the broader dialogue on social justice and inclusive education. And it is on this that we will focus next.

Adventist Abolitionism and Reparations for Slavery

The first mention by White of the role of education as a form of reparation dates back to 1896. At that time, abolition in the United States of America had already passed three decades. In the *Review and Herald*, the main denomination's magazine at the time, she wrote about the scars of slavery and the need to extend opportunities to those suffering the consequences.

Colored people are suffering the results of the slavery in which they have been held. When they were slaves, they were taught to do the will of those who held them as their property. They were kept in ignorance, and today, there are thousands among them who cannot read. [...] Every system of slavery originated with Satan, who delights in tyranny over human beings. Though he has succeeded in debasing and corrupting the black race, many are possessed of decided capabilities and, if blessed with opportunities, will show more intelligence than many of their more favored white brethren. Thousands may now be educated and become agents to help others of their race. There are many who feel the need for instruction (White, 1896, our translation).

White saw the role of state actions and the church in promoting social mobility for these excluded individuals, which involves both government involvement and private engagement (White, 2021, p. 160, our translation). One of her most forceful statements was the speech "Our Duty to the Colored People," delivered on March 21, 1891, during the annual session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In it, White drew attention to the need for Christian engagement against the evils caused by slavery and perpetuated by racism.

Analyzing the appeal, Ramona Hyman (2017, p. 62, our translation) remarks that "White did not suggest that the church should help African Americans; she stated that the church had a duty, that is, an obligation to people of color." Her strong rhetoric was not the only contribution. Her activism involved financial support, which ranged from aiding poorly paid black ministers to the establishment of institutions, serving as "proof of her commitment to the oppressed" (Burton, 2017, p. 75-76, our translation).

Some of these contents are compiled in the work *The Southern Work* (1890), the first work that shaped her concerns previously expressed through periodicals. Later, the church's responsibility towards African Americans would also find space in *Testimonies for the Church*, through volumes 7 and 9, published in 1902 and 1909, respectively. In these contents, affirmative actions are seen as a way to correct the inequalities caused by slavery.

Much more might have been accomplished in behalf of the colored people of America if suitable efforts had been put forth by the government and by Christian churches, immediately after the emancipation. Money should have been freely used on their behalf in caring for and educating them at a time when their necessity was very great. However, the government, after a slight effort, left the colored people to struggle unaided with their tremendous difficulties. Some of the strong Christian churches began a good work, but, alas! Failed, accomplishing but comparatively little. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also failed in its portion. Some persevering efforts have been made by individuals and societies to lift the colored people, and this has been a noble work. How few, though, have taken part in it, a work which should have enlisted the sympathy and help of all! Noble efforts have been put forth by some Seventh-day Adventists in doing what should be done for the colored people (White, 2021, p. 160, our translation).

Ellen G. White's discourse reflected the anti-racist practice of Adventists, which was already in place decades before the denomination's organization in 1863. The members of the Millerite movement, who would become pioneering Adventists, understood that slave practices were incompatible with the Christian faith. Through the main Adventist periodical of the time, John Andrews (1851), one of the greatest missionaries in the denomination's history, questioned the legitimacy of the United States Declaration of Independence (1776): "If 'all men are created equal,' then why do we hold three million slaves in bondage? Why is the black race reduced to the category of personal property, and bought and sold like brute beasts?"

John N. Loughborough, another pioneering Adventist and contemporary of Ellen G. White, drew attention to the inherent equality among all human beings: "Slaves, what are they? Men like ourselves, except perhaps in their appearance. The Declaration of Independence should have had a clause added, and it should have been: All men are created free and equal, except three and a half million" (Loughborough, 1854, our translation). The defense of slavery was considered a symbol of declining Christianity or, in more precise theological terms, evidence of apostasy. This perspective is exemplified in the statement of Uriah Smith, another important pioneer and close friend of Ellen G. White:

Millions who groan under the rod of oppression, beneath the chains forged by the sin of slavery, robbed of their rights, degraded to brutes, and soul and body bound to another's will, let their united cries, and tears, and groans, that daily ascend, call aloud upon heaven for vengeance (Smith, 1853, our translation).

Trafficking, commercialization, possession, or any form of support for the slave system prevented membership. The abolitionist stance was an inherent characteristic of several early Adventist leaders, so they were opposed by pro-slavery forces in the South on some occasions during the 1840s (Knight, 2015, p. 124-125, 132). Missionaries often suffered assaults (Knight, 2015, p. 107-108). Hostility persisted in the following decades and delayed the Adventist presence in the region until 1870 when Adventists, already organized as a denomination and concerned with working in the South, sent teachers to the South to open schools for the freedmen (Schwarz; Greenleaf, 2022, p. 282).

Educational Initiatives for African Americans

White's appeals had an impact. The first of these was the construction of the Morning Star, a multi-purpose vessel for evangelistic activities, initiated by her son James White in conjunction with William O. Palmer. One of the main activities carried out on board was the education of African Americans in the South, a region where the consequences of slavery were even more noticeable (Baker, 2018, p. 1098). The project was considered extravagant due to its dimensions and was funded by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which at the time had modest funds.

Work began in 1885 after two years of construction. Docked in Vicksburg, Mississippi, volunteers "began making visits, evangelistic meetings, and teaching classes at a night school. The children of former slaves and some of their parents and grandparents learned to read, write, and sing lively Christian hymns" (Baker, 2018, p. 1098, our translation). The vessel also served as the headquarters of the Southern Missionary Society and housed the printing press of the Gospel Herald magazine, aimed at African Americans.

On board the Morning Star, the book *The Southern Work* (1890) was also printed, a compilation of texts about the evangelization of African Americans. The profits from the publication were entirely devoted to evangelistic work with this audience. The activities continued for ten years, during which Adventism became established among African Americans.

Oakwood University, founded in 1896, emerged within this context. Directed towards the education of African Americans, it was based on educational projects already implemented by other denominations, which had invested in similar educational institutions (Warren, 2018, p. 868). The school's main objective, as with other institutions aimed at serving African Americans, was the preparation of black leadership and received strong public support from Ellen G. White.

According to Delbert Baker, the Harlem Institute (1920), Riverside Hospital (1927), Message Magazine (1934), Pine Forge Institute (1946), and the Breath of Life television program confirm that the "influence of Ellen White in favor of Adventist work among African Americans" made significant contributions "long after her death, reaching the present" (Baker, 2018, p. 642, our translation). As a result, between 1890 and 1910, the denomination grew from 50 African American members to 3,500 (Baker, 2018, p. 642). The growth in financial revenue in this segment resulted in the establishment of churches and schools, as well as the hiring of employees and ministers.

Affirmative action and education: Ellen G. White's vision in contemporary times

Affirmative action has been depicted as a new abolition. This is a reasonable way to perceive it. If the first broke the chains but failed to integrate the freed into society, the second can reconfigure social relations in the country by offering opportunities for education and employment. Measures that include Blacks in spaces still underrepresented by them promote a fairer and more effectively democratic country. This is a way to reshape the destinies of descendants of former slaves who, after gaining freedom, were deprived of proper integration into society. Considering this issue, one might ponder the role of religion in this process?

In England and the USA, Christians led the defense of abolitionism. As Joaquim Nabuco noted, in these countries, "the propaganda of emancipation was a religious movement, preached from the pulpit, fervently supported by different churches and religious communities" (Nabuco, 2019, p. 43, our translation). In Brazil, however, although these movements influenced Nabuco himself, "the abolitionist movement owes nothing, unfortunately, to the State Church; on the contrary, the possession of men and women by convents and by the entire secular clergy entirely demoralized the religious feelings of masters and slaves" (Nabuco, 2019, p. 43, our translation).

The same accusation was made by the Bahian physician Luis Anselmo da Fonseca who, at the twilight of the slave system in Brazil, published the work *A escravidão, o clero e o abolicionismo*⁵, where he lamented the church's support for slavery in Brazil: "Nothing is more contrary to biblical traditions than indifference to the public good" (Fonseca, 1887, p. 40, our translation). For him, religion could not be limited to forms, liturgies, and cults but should influence the entire society.

In Brazil, as explained by Hélio Santos, racism is systematic, as it "permeates the entire society and institutions," and inertial, as it occurs recurrently and unchecked (Santos, 2022, p. 415, our translation). Thus, White's considerations of affirmative action are absolutely applicable to the contemporary Brazilian context. Just as slavery ended, its consequences also need to stop.

In an editorial on social inequality in Brazil published in 1988 in the *Decision* magazine, a magazine produced by the Brazilian Publishing House (CPB), the official publisher of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brazil, Pastor Márcio Dias Guarda emphasized the impact of slavery: "there is no racial inferiority; what exists are different social and economic opportunities that [...] influence intelligence, lifespan, and other parameters used to label races"

⁵ "Slavery, the Clergy, and Abolitionism".

(Guarda, 1988, p. 2, our translation). For him, the centenary of abolition should be seen as "a cue for a broader discussion of racism, [...] which did not die with abolition, nor with a century of experience with the so-called racial democracy" (Guarda, 1988, p. 2, our translation).

If African Americans faced the consequences of an incomplete abolitionist process decades after abolition, including deprivation of citizenship and opportunities, the same scenario can be observed in the contemporary reality of Brazil, where Adventism stands out as one of the largest organized religious denominations. White's call for social justice for blacks should inspire and motivate. And this undoubtedly involves the role we give to education. Resistance to actions that improve the living conditions of blacks may be one of the most serious manifestations of racism in its implications. As she mentioned in a letter: "As soon as an effort is made to educate and uplift this people, who have been kept in ignorance and slavery for so long, the envy of whites is aroused" (White, 1899, our translation). A few years later, she noted that the problem persisted: "As soon as people begin to make any movement to educate the blacks, there are some who are determined that it shall not be done" (White, 1907, our translation).

White's statements on the subject are pertinent for reflection on a public theology that leads the church back to the abolitionist and anti-racist principles followed by Adventist pioneers and other Protestant groups throughout history. They are also relevant for highlighting that education is a pathway to promote social justice. White's practice and discourse, along with many other pioneers of the Adventist movement, demonstrate this.

The abolitionist process, although marking the formal end of slavery, did not result in true emancipation for Afro-descendants, leaving them on the sidelines of society and deprived of citizenship and opportunities, precisely due to the lack of access to quality education. The reality of contemporary Brazil reflects this incompleteness, evidenced by the need for affirmative policies, such as racial quotas, which attempt to remedy these inequalities. Ellen G. White's attention to racial issues and her call for social justice resonate deeply in this context. Her words highlight the ongoing resistance against the education and social upliftment of blacks, a barrier that current policies still seek to overcome.

Final considerations

As we have argued at the beginning of this work, the implementation of affirmative action in Brazil is surrounded by controversies, especially when they involve racial criteria. Although the argumentation here does not end the controversies, and without forgetting that we live in a secular country, we believe that all social agents need to be involved in the construction and pursuit of the education we aspire to. And this certainly brings the religious aspect to the debate analyzed here as necessary. While it cannot be all-encompassing, risking the loss of our secularity, it also cannot be ignored in the public arena, under the same risk.

The present work has investigated how the writings of Ellen G. White on social justice and education can enrich and guide the implementation of affirmative action policies in contemporary Brazil, in light of current debates on the subject. The analysis has revealed that White's perspectives not only align with the contemporary needs of social justice and educational equality but also offer a solid ethical and moral framework to support reparative measures in favor of historically marginalized communities.

Ellen G. White vehemently advocated for education as a fundamental right, necessary to correct past injustices and promote a more just and egalitarian society. Her ideas highlight education as a crucial pillar in the fight against structural racism, providing a solid foundation for advocating racial quota policies in Brazil. Educational inclusion, according to White, not only equips individuals with the necessary skills for their economic and social emancipation but also acts as a catalyst for broader social transformation, challenging existing power structures and promoting equality.

Furthermore, White's writings underscore the importance of community and institutional action in promoting social justice, a perspective that can inspire churches and other religious organizations to actively engage in the implementation and support of affirmative policies. Through an interdisciplinary approach that intertwines theology, education, and law, this study proposes that the incorporation of White's principles can strengthen the foundations of affirmative actions, ensuring that they are perceived not only as temporary measures but as part of a broad and continuous commitment to restorative justice.

Therefore, by bringing the teachings of Ellen G. White into the debate on affirmative action in Brazil, alongside those of contemporary thinkers, we highlight the enduring relevance of her ideas on social justice and education. This dialogue between past and present not only illuminates the historical roots of contemporary inequalities but also offers a hopeful and

pragmatic perspective for the future of racial inclusion policies in Brazil and elsewhere in the world.

However, it is acknowledged that this study faces limitations that must be considered. Firstly, the practical application of Ellen G. White's teachings in a contemporary political and social context may raise questions about their relevance and effectiveness, given that social and cultural conditions have evolved since White's time. Additionally, an analysis focused on a single theorist may not capture the complexity and diversity of opinions necessary for such a multifaceted debate as that of affirmative action policies. Lastly, care must be taken not to oversimplify or generalize White's contributions in a way that applies them indiscriminately to any context or social problem. Future research could broaden the scope of the discussion by integrating other voices and theological and religious perspectives, further enriching the understanding and implementation of affirmative action.

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