Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Speech to the Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” 1860

It was thought a small matter to kidnap a black man in Africa, and set him to work in the rice swamps of Georgia; but when we look at the panorama of horrors that followed that event, at all the statute laws that were enacted to make that act legal, at the perversion of man’s moral sense and innate love of justice in being compelled to defend such laws; when we consider the long, hard tussle we have witnessed here for near a century between the spirit of Liberty and Slavery, we may, in some measure, appreciate the magnitude of the wrong done to that one, lone, friendless negro, who, under the cover of darkness and the star-spangled banner, was stolen from his African hut and lodged in the hold of the American slaver. That one act has, in its consequences, convulsed this Union. It has corrupted our churches, our politics, our press; laid violent hands on Northern freemen at their own firesides; it has gagged our statesmen, and stricken our Northern Senators dumb in their seats; yes, beneath the flag of freedom, Liberty has crouched in fear. . . .

I have always regarded [William Lloyd] Garrison as the great missionary of the gospel of Jesus to this guilty nation, for he has waged an uncompromising warfare with the deadly sins of both Church and State. My own experience is, no doubt, that of many others. In the darkness and gloom of a false theology, I was slowly sawing off the chains of my spiritual bondage, when, for the first time, I met Garrison in London. A few bold strokes from the hammer of his truth, I was free! Only those who have lived all their lives under the dark clouds of vague, undefined fears can appreciate the joy of a doubting soul suddenly born into the kingdom of reason and free thought. Is the bondage of the priest- ridden less galling than that of the slave, because we do not see the chains, the indelible scars, the festering wounds, the deep degradation of all the powers of the God-like mind?. . . .

Yes, this is the only organization on God’s footstool where the humanity of woman is recognized, and these are the only men who have ever echoed back her cries for justice and equality. I shall never forget our champions in the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention; how nobly [Wendell] Phillips did speak, and how still more nobly Garrison would not speak, because woman was there denied her rights. . . .

No the mission of this Radical Anti-Slavery Movement is not to the African slave alone, but to the slaves of custom, creed and sex, as well; and most faithfully has it done its work. . . . As we rejoice this day in our deliverance from the sad train of fears and errors that have so long crippled and dwarfed the greatest minds of earth. . . . , let us see a new and holier baptism for the work that lies for each of us in the future. . . .

In conversation with a reverend gentleman, not long ago, I chanced to speak of the injustice done to woman. Ah! said he, so far from complaining, your heart should go out in thankfulness that you are an American woman, for in no country in the world does woman hold so high a position as here. Why, sir, said I< you must be very ignorant, or very false. Is my political position as high as that of Victoria, Queen of the mightiest nation on the globe? Are not nearly two millions of native-born American woman, at this very hour, doomed to the foulest slavery that angels ever wept to witness? Are they not doubly damned as immortal beasts of burden in the field, and sad mothers of a most accursed race? Are not they raised for the express purpose of lust? Are they not chained and driven in the slave-coffle at the crack of the whip of an unfeeling driver? Are they not sold on the auction-block? Are they not exposed naked to the course jests and voluptuous eyes of brutal men? Are they not trained up in ignorance of all laws, both human and divine, and denied the right to read the Bible? For them there is no Sabbath, no Jesus, no Heaven, no hope, no holy mission of wife and mother, no privacy of home, nothing sacred to look for, but an eternal sleep in dust and the grave. And these are the daughters and sisters of the first men in the Southern states: think of fathers and brothers selling their own flesh on the auction block, exposing beautiful women of refinement and education in a New Orleans market, and selling them, body and soul, to the highest bidder! And this is the condition of woman in republican, Christian America, and you dare not look me in the face, and tell me that, for blessings such as these, my heart should go out in thankfulness! No, proud priest, you may cover your soul in holy robes, and hide your manhood in a pulpit, and, like the Pharisee of old, turn your face away from the sufferings of your race; but I am a Christian – a follower of Jesus – and “whatever is done unto one of the least of these my sisters is done also unto me.”