

## THE VISION OF JANE STANFORD

A Statement by the Rev. Scotty McLennan, Dean for Religious Life  
University Public Worship, Stanford Memorial Church  
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Jane Stanford was quoted by President Branner in 1917 as having said that "moral and spiritual instruction is more important to our young people than instruction of any kind."<sup>i</sup> The Stanfords' founding grant required that a church be erected at the university.<sup>ii</sup> It was built at the very center of the campus. Then Mrs. Stanford had her vision of morality and spirituality carved into the very walls of this church. As you walk around inside this sanctuary, you'll find a collection of instructive and inspirational sayings that she assembled over the years before the church was built -- some scriptural from the New Testament of her Christian faith, some pietistic exhortations related to Jesus, but also others which are much more universal. I'd like to highlight excerpts from some of those inscriptions now, as a preamble to three of our students, from different religious traditions, answering the question "Education for What?" In so doing, I'll alter for modern ears the references to "man" and "he" that Jane Stanford used to refer to humanity as a whole, as I assume she would do if writing today.

"There is no narrowing so deadly as the narrowing of one's horizon of spiritual things...And it is not civilization that can prevent this; it is not civilization that can compensate for it. No widening of science, no possession of abstract truth, can indemnify for an enfeebled hold on the highest and central truths of humanity. 'What shall one give in exchange for one's soul?'<sup>iii</sup>

"Knowledge is intelligence and its imprint comes upon the mind. [But] wisdom is the

desire of the heart<sup>iv</sup> prompted by God's highest and most Divine nature -- and comprises all knowledge. Wisdom is the highest spiritual intelligence, while the natural person, through knowledge, can know nothing of wisdom.<sup>v</sup>

"Each of us, like every other individuality, has an object and a purpose to fulfill; and, when we comprehend this, we will think too much of ourselves to stoop to any material action that shall bring us down from the highest position on the throne of our nature.<sup>vi</sup>

"We say God is love, but if we do not feel the power of God's love, we do not know anything about it. To be loved by others makes the power of love within our hearts grow...We speak of love, but what do we know about it, unless we see the power of love manifested; unless we are given the power to bestow, and a willing heart to bestow it upon, and within humanity.<sup>vii</sup>

"If we do good deeds to others and try to help them to live happier and better lives by being kind to them, and teaching them of the God germ within themselves, we in that way sow the seed, and in God's own way and time it will be made to grow.<sup>viii</sup>

"By your life only can you prove your principles to the world, and show to them there is a life worth living.<sup>ix</sup>

"May the peace which no earthly disturbance can mar, which is of God's inspiration and love, fill your hearts, and enable you to go on in the journey of life with a feeling of trust and confidence that nothing can disturb."<sup>x</sup> AMEN.

## NOTES

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- i. John Casper Branner, "Founders' Day Address," March 10, 1917, pp. 4-5, as cited by Robert L. Young in God and a Woman at Stanford (Cupertino, CA: Dime Publishers, 1991), p. 41.
  - ii. Stanford University, The Founding Grant, p. 8.
  - iii. From an inscription on the north wall of the nave of the Stanford Memorial Church, between the entrance doors.
  - iv. Underlining added to the original.
  - v. From the walls of the east transept.
  - vi. Ibid.
  - vii. Ibid.
  - viii. From the walls of the west transept.
  - ix. Ibid.
  - x. Ibid.