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Unification Thought and the Global  
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**AESTHETICS:**  
**UNIFICATION AESTHETICS**

by

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The most widely accepted meaning of aesthetics, according to the Encyclopedia of World Art, is "the theory of the beautiful and of art." But since the late nineteenth century, and more recently, there is a trend that stresses the empirical character of aesthetics and defines it as "a science of art."<sup>1</sup> Thus this paper on the Unification Theory of Art is a paper on aesthetics as understood mainly by Dr. S.H. Lee who, on the basis of his reading of The Divine Principle has described the rational basis, "the science" of Unification ideas on the subject of art and the beautiful.

In Chapter 7 of Explaining Unification Thought, "Theory of Art", Dr. S.H. Lee states that "Art is the essence of culture." He points to the global vulgarization of art explaining that "Decadent art generates decadent culture. Left as it is, culture cannot but decline. Therefore, in order to create new culture, we need to build true art. For that purpose a new theory of art is necessary." <sup><2></sup>

The purpose of my paper is to briefly summarize the UT theory of art, to suggest some of the ways this new theory relates to earlier theories and to raise some questions as to the usefulness of this theory for the Church.

Although Divine Principle does not address the topic of aesthetics in a formal way, many of the references to creativity and art, their essence and action, closely parallel the fundamental aesthetic concepts of both the Orient and the West. Although Reverend Moon makes almost no reference to traditional theories, he has a highly developed artistic sense as Dr. S.H. Lee has so clearly stated.<sup><3></sup> Unification Church activities have been informed from the beginning by Korean understanding of the importance of beauty and by Western reliance on imagery. However, although the Church has participated in many aspects of modern media technology, and is a generous sponsor of countless cultural activities, it does not share in some developments of modern art, since modern art has become a largely secular enterprise out of tune with the well-springs of Unification thought.

Nevertheless, the importance of art in Unification thought is clear from page 1 of Outline of the Principle: Level Four where, accompanied by a diagram, the following statement is made in introducing the question of the nature of God:

How can we know the nature of God who is invisible? We can know it through observing the Creation. Just as the work of an artist is the visible manifestation of its maker's invisible nature,

every being in the Creation is a substantial manifestation of the invisible nature of God, its Creator. Just as we can sense an author's character through his work, so we can perceive God's nature through his creation.<4>

Unification thought frequently makes the parallelism between the artist's creativity and that of God. Clearly this parallelism works only one way. Not all of God's Creation produces an aesthetic response, that special experience we have in the presence of art and beauty. We encounter God's Creation at every hand while the aesthetic experience is understood to be an unusual one even though it can be produced by a wide variety of kinds of art such as music, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, gardens, poetry, and natural phenomena of a special kind.

Let us first examine the Unification references to art. They are grounded in Unification theology according to which God, the Original Image, is conceived as the union of the original, invisible, *Sung Sang* (roughly, Spirit) and the original invisible *Hyung Sang* (roughly ideas of shape, ideas of structure, roughly, matter).

A short analysis of the *kangi* used to designate these terms will be helpful for our later application of these terms to art and artists. *Sung* is made up of two characters:

性 相

The first *kangi* stands for 'heart'. The second one stands for 'life'. *Sang* is made up also of two characters. The first is tree, the second is eye. Clearly, *Sung Sang* is a complex term referring to a state of being that includes emotion, sensibility, intuitive understanding and the multitude of states of feeling that can result from the combination of heart, life, structure and insight. When used to 'define' God, the term 'original inner' *Sung Sang* is appropriate.

*Hyung* comes from two different *kangi*:

形 相

The first stands for two hands; the second for form. *Sang* is repeated as in *Sung Sang*. Although *Sang* uses the same characters used in the first term, its meaning is somewhat modified by the difference in the preceding characters. Thus the original inner, *Hyung Sang* carries the connotation of potential active energy, a possibility to shape matter, to give form and structure. Taken together these terms seem to suggest Aristotle's terms *eidos* (form) and *hyle*(matter).<5> But, whereas Aristotle's

terms are clearly defined and spring from Reason, *Sung Sang* and *Hyung Sang* (hereafter SS and HY) should be thought of more like the circle of Yin /Yang where each term has the seed of the other in it and neither terms is complete without the other. The dual aspects of positivity/negativity and active/ passive are also implied by the two oriental terms. We might also recall here that Aristotle's writings on aesthetics were confined to an analysis of tragedy and have little relevance to the problems of the visual arts or music.

SS and HS are dynamic and inseparable concepts. Unification Thought speaks of the "give and take" action between the two aspects of the Original Image or the relational action between the two aspects. "God's most essential character is Heart, or the emotional impulse to seek joy through loving an object."<6> Thus God cannot be defined as separate from his creation which has a purpose namely: to give joy.

This vision of the Original Image as the combination of the two terms is essential for our understanding of art, artistic creation and artists themselves because man's creativity is a reflection of God's creativity as man was created in God's image. In the West, fifth (?) century philosopher Plotinus understood that " Art is a symbol in a double sense: of that lower reality which it perfects and that ultimate reality which it mirrors."<7> Here we have a notion of reflection, but not of dynamic give and take action.

The words of Divine Principle express a dynamic interaction:

After having created the universe, God finally created man in His image, after the pattern of his own character, with tremendous potential. Man was intended to enjoy and appreciate his position as an object to God.<8>

Furthermore, The Principle understands the purpose and center of the universe to be man himself. It is fascinating to read the interpretive analogy:

If there were no men to see and appreciate the universe, the universe could be compared to a museum without any visitors. The articles in the museum can display the value of their existence only when there is a man to appreciate, love, and take delight in them...Man was created to be the center of the whole creation."

Once again, the analogy to the work of artists, precious objects in a museum, is chosen to illustrate love and joy in creation.

According to Divine Principle, there is an overarching purpose to creation centered on man, namely "to return joy to

God, the Creator."<9> Because the most essential aspect of God is heart, and heart is the impulse to love, there must be an object for that impulse. That object is Creation and from this object of love and caring God experiences Joy. To illustrate this relationship Outline of the Principle, Level Four, gives the example of painter who may feel joy when he conceives of the idea of a painting which reflects his own SS and HS.<10> But his satisfaction - joy - is truly fulfilled when his painting stands as a completed work separate from himself and embodies his idea as a substantial object. The purpose of his creation has been achieved and his experience is Joy.

So far, we have been discussing qualities that describe the nature of God. But man also is endowed with *Sung Sang* and *Hyung Sang*. In other words man has qualities mirroring those of God and has the capacity to create as does God. Man's creative power also relates purposefully to an object. According to Unification Thought art is the activity of creating joy through the creation and appreciation of beauty.<11> ( Further along in this paper we will discuss the problematic aspect of this definition.) The more the SS of the subject and the object resemble each other, the greater the appreciation of beauty.<12>

The more the SS and the HS of the artist and his work resemble each other, the greater the appreciation of beauty and through beauty, joy is experienced.<13>

To further clarify this line of thinking, we need to enlarge the Divine Principle's definition of man as subject and the object to which he is related. Man is simultaneously seen as the microcosm, or a contracted body of the cosmos. Thus, the expanded cosmos, the macrocosm also resembles man. In other words, there is a resemblance between man and the entire universe of created entities. It then follows that the qualities of SS and HS are universally inherent.

Within this universality, the task of the artist, according to Unification thought, is to create joy through the appreciation of beauty where joy comes from an object (visible or invisible) in which we see our own character reflected <14> and beauty is the emotional stimulation that the object gives the subject.<15>

Furthermore, a work of art must have purpose, a theme to express that purpose, and a plan for the execution of the work. According to Dr. Lee, purpose, theme and plan are part of the SS aspect of the painting. When the purpose, theme and plan become materialized into the actual canvas, paint and composition, the HS of the painting becomes actualized. If SS and HS are harmonious, the artist has achieved part of his task. If the painting then connects with the observer's SS and HS, forming a resemblance between the two, beauty will be experienced. A triangular relationship has been accomplished between the artist, the art work and the viewer, but the addition of "heart"/God

returns us to the balanced four point foundation so essential to Unification thought.

Beauty, according to UT, is a value like truth and goodness and is determined through the subject's judgment of the emotional stimulation derived from an object that causes the subject to feel joy.<16> The element of beauty in an object ( and here we come the closest to a Unification definition of beauty) is the combination of the object's purpose and the harmony of the physical elements within the object. The physical elements such as lines, shapes sounds colors, space etc. are harmonized centering of the purpose of creation. Harmony is the element which gives rise to the feeling of beauty.

The artists' creation of beauty involves a purpose, theme and plan for the work arising out of his or her inner SS and HS, always centered on heart and in relation to God's purpose. Art for art's sake has no place in Unification Thought. In addition, for Unificationists the moral stance of the artist must be considered. The artist must develop an object consciousness in order to be able to express this beauty.

Briefly, such consciousness requires the artist to:

1. Console God for His historical sorrow.
2. Console the many sages and righteous people, past and present, including Jesus, who walked the path of Restoration with God.
3. Portray the deeds of good people who have been persecuted by people of the sinful world.
4. Inform people of the ideal world to come.
5. Praise God the Creator by expressing the beauty and mystery of nature.<17>

Few contemporary artists would be able to conform to these guidelines and still satisfy their contemporary viewers or themselves. But as we already pointed out, Unification guidelines for aesthetics rule out a good deal of modern art.

As Reverend Moon stated at the opening of the Universal Ballet Company in Washington D.C. in November 1990:

The latter part of the twentieth century (however) can be characterized as a time of confusion...At its basis, this confusion is a confusion of values... This confusion has permeated the artistic community as well. In many cases modern-day art and artists have forgotten the original purpose and value of serving our fellow man and glorifying God.

This explanation of aesthetic experience has roots in ancient oriental thought.

A similar connection of art to the life of the spirit has long informed Chinese art and has influenced the whole development of the arts in the orient. Since the sixth century, oriental aesthetics which came to Korea with the influence of Buddhism, have been judged according to the six principles (*liu fa*) of Hsieh Ho. The first principle is the key to the other five and is implied in them also. It is called *Ch'i yun sheng tung* : translated to mean Spirit Harmony - Life's motion (Arthur Waley): Animation through spirit consonance (Alexander Soper) <18> *Ch'i* refers to the cosmic spirit, the vitalizing principle inherent in all things, the life giving force in man and nature, and in animate and inanimate phenomena. Without this spirit flowing through him as he works, the artist will fail to produce the proper experience for the viewer. It is easy to see the correspondence between the invisible *ch'i* and the inner *Sang Sung*. Through the centuries, Chinese aesthetics have kept this standard and called upon art "to reflect the transcendental and to reveal the higher requirements of the human spirit.<19> However, the Chinese tradition does not link aesthetics with God's purpose or man's service whereas in Unification Thought, all creativity has a purpose.

On the other hand, we suggest that the legacy of Confucian thought with its emphasis on *Jen* or "human heartedness" with its moral and social implications may have influenced the development of Unification aesthetics. Although in Confucian thinking there is no concept of the Divine as we know it from the bible, there is an emphasis on moral behavior. Remembering that the central attribute of God in Unification Thought is 'heart' by adding the concept of *Jen* to that of *Ch'i* we may have the basic roots of Unification attitudes to art.

Notice that neither in the *Ch'I* nor in *Jen* is there any sense of an absolute standard . In addition, both concepts imply a state of being rather than a process of becoming. The dialectical aspect of Unification Thought has western roots.

In Unification Thought, there are statements about beauty, but beauty is not taken to be an absolute nor is there any attempt to define Beauty in itself, only what beauty does. In a recent paper on Unification aesthetics beauty is seen as a "value in the same way as truth and goodness, <and> beauty can be expressed in another way as "the value of an object felt as emotional stimulation." <20> In Dr. Lee's writing, beauty is not necessarily related to art, but is descriptive of human relations as well as sensory perceptions. His definitions do not refer specifically to either music, visual arts or literature. He is clear that in such philosophers of the past such as Plato and Kant, definitions of beauty do not include emotional relations between people. Rather, taking off from Divine Principle, we learn from Dr. Lee that "when subject and object become united, there comes into being a love that is latent even in beauty and a

beauty latent even in love." <21> In other words, there are no objective standards that can be applied to an object that will fulfill the definition of beauty. When we are considering a system based on a purposeful creation based on "heart", beauty arises out of love, not out of abstract qualities such as harmony, symmetry, form, proportion, balance, or consonance of parts, concrete elements that can be analyzed rationally and compared objectively.

Such a definition of beauty is not helpful in evaluating the merit of architecture, painting, sculpture or any of the categories we think of as Fine Art. A theory of human relationships, and even relationships to nature cannot be so easily transposed into a theory of aesthetics. The designer of a building may relate to his project with love, with emotional attachment, but the result may not be beautiful to the observer unless it is both functional and sensuously satisfying. In addition, a building considered beautiful in one culture may not be so considered in another. Problems of perception and interpretation need to be considered in the Unification scheme.

Long ago, Plato realized the inadequacy of knowledge gained by perception. In the corporeal world he understood that we are all subject to changing states and mere opinion. Plato felt an ethical need for knowledge that went beyond mere sense perception.<22> Out of this need, he developed his system of Ideas, conceptions that he believed came from a recollection of Forms we once knew but have forgotten in this earthly existence. These Ideas are the true reality. Beauty is one of these ideas like Truth and Goodness. Plato's Ideas have the character of Being as opposed to those which have the quality of Becoming. They stand as absolute standards. But Plato never defined precisely what Beauty was beyond his notion of Beauty as an ideal conception. Plato gave the Western world the notion that there was an abstract idea beyond the material phenomenon that was perfect, and beautiful, a conception that to this day is difficult to define.

Plotinus came closer to Unification Thought when he proposed that " when the Soul encounters sensible beauty, it experiences pleasure because it perceives there a communal nature which carries it back to the possibility of the ultimate harmony with the One."<23> Beauty becomes for Plotinus, a symbol of cosmic harmony and a symbol of a higher reality to which all beautiful things are related. Beauty is second in the order of emanations after the Good. Works of art stand some where midway between the works of the natural world and Beauty itself.

Plotinus writes:

Beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight; but there is a beauty for hearing too, as in certain combination of words, and in all kinds of music, for melodies and



cadences are beautiful; and minds that lift themselves above the realm of sense to a higher order are aware of the beauty in the conduct of life, in actions, in character, in the pursuits of the intellect; and there is the beauty of the virtues.

Continuing, Plotinus asks how a material thing becomes beautiful and he answers that this happens though communicating in the thought that flows from the Divine.

In order to do so, one must become a pure being. One must:

cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is down cast ... and when you have attained an inner unity, then and then only you will have the only eye that sees the mighty Beauty... To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, and having some likeness to it. Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have the vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful."<24>

Thus Plotinus continues with Plato's notion of a perfect abstract First Beauty, but he adds to this idea the concept of relation, and one that is close to Unification Thought. We could transpose the statements of Plotinus into the language of Unification Thought by saying that unless the Sung Sang/Hyung Sang of the viewer (the eye that sees the mighty Beauty) has a relation to a "likeness" to the object (the sun ), the Soul will have no vision of Beauty. Where this concept differs from Dr. Lee's interpretations of Beauty is the absence of an idea of purpose, and a presence of an abstract concept which is not relational- - i.e. a First Beauty.

A long and detailed analysis could be made of the relationship of Unification aesthetics to the history of aesthetics, but here, we will only briefly sample contemporary examples, enough to point out the discrepancy between modern aesthetics, a largely secular enterprise and the current Unification writing on aesthetics.

The influential Italian aestheticist, Benedetto Croce maintained that intuition is the basis of all art. For Croce, intuition is inseparable from feeling and without this unity there is no art. Although Croce links the process of making art to the original creation, he does not ascribe any moral or didactic purpose to art. His work paved the way for that of Susanne Langer who sees art as a symbol of feeling.<25> John Dewey, on the other hand writes that art is the result of experience - experience of a kind that absorbs the past and the future into an ordering of the present moment. An artist is a person who can present experience through the use of a particular medium,i.e. as shapes, colors or notes.

A very different point of view is set forth in Martin Heidegger's essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art". This essay does not concentrate on the problem of the beauty of a work of art or of its symbolic value or of the experience of the artist alone but of the truth contained in the work itself. "Art," writes Heidegger, "is truth setting itself to work." <26>

"All art is 'image making'", writes E.H. Gombrich and H. Wolfflin once remarked that "all pictures owe more to other pictures than they do to nature." <27>

In "Art and Objecthood", a critique by Michael Fried of minimalist art, or as he calls it, literalist art, he points out that Donald Judd, a leading minimalist, stated that "all that matters is whether or not a given work is able to elicit and sustain (his) interest." <28>

Even this short review indicates that modern writing about aesthetics is non-theological in that it does not present art within a system relating to God. In addition, it does not assert the didactic place of art or its direct connection to morality. Art is not understood as a reforming activity.

Such a separation of art from God's purpose, from the task of bringing joy to God, distinguishes the Unification Theory of Art from the world of modern aesthetics. However, the dialectic aspect of Unification theories is quite compatible with theories of art which, beginning with Hegel, understand the relatedness between subject and object, spirit and matter, visible and invisible. The major distinction, however, remains the disconnection of modern art to transcendental forces.

According to Unification Thought, the crisis of values which affects modern art can be overcome by "the program of activities adopted by the Unification Movement to carry out its quiet revolution in values...the Unification Movement is actually creating a new standard of art with an intensive program of education on the Unification worldview, including its theory of art..." <29>

According to Dr. Lee the Unification theory of art is based on a four point foundation:

HEART

IDEALISM

REALISM

UNIFICATIONISM <30>

This defining diagram has a problem with its terminology. 'Idealism' and 'Realism' are relative stylistic designations whose meaning is constantly changing. They depend on culture, geography, class location, and the ideology of the artist. What was ideal for Phidias in ancient Athens is different from the idealism of Raphael; is different again from the idealism of Bernini and again different from the idealism of Mallioli. 'Realism' is an even more difficult to define as it relates to 'reality' that ever elusive, ever changing idea.

The realism of the nineteenth century has little to do with the realism of a Caravaggio or a Picasso. And what do we do with terms such as "naturalism", "photo-realism", "verisimilitude", "surrealism", or "magic realism" all useful stylistic descriptions in the history of art.

The example that Dr. Lee uses to explain his diagram is the Angelus by Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875).<31> The painting depicts two peasants, a man and a woman - presumably husband and wife- in a field as their day of harvesting draws to a close. They have paused in their work. The man has planted his pitchfork in the ground and the woman has set down her basket. Against the evening sky, a steeple appears on the far horizon. We can imagine that the couple has paused because of the bells sounding the evening Ave Maria. The woman's head is bathed in light as she bows her head. The man's face is obscure and he seems to be twirling his hat.

What Unification Thought attempts to convey through diagrams, we can express by stating that the SS/HS of the artist, in this case, Millet, is responding to peasant life accurately and sympathetically. To convey his observations and his sympathy he has used his skill to arrange images on a canvas in a way that the observer will understand the message. With the proper consciousness at work, the artist has created beauty and given joy to God, fulfilling the purpose of art.

Recalling the requirements for a successful art work, according to Unification Thought, there must be a reciprocity, an intuitive recognition between the artist, the art work and the viewer, the listener, or the reader. At the human level, the creation of a work of art parallels the creativity of God. The purpose in both cases, according to Unification Thought, is to give joy on each level, the human and the Divine. The SS/HS of the artist are in a give and take relationship with the object created. However, and this is critical, whether Millet's Angelus satisfies these

criteria becomes a matter of interpretation when the culture and the biography of Millet are investigated.

Here we may run into trouble. His naturalistic style may spring from a religious base or it may be mainly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution then taking place in France. One commentator writes after quoting a letter from Millet that referred to The Angelus :

...the real key to understanding the painting is to see the differences between the man and the praying woman. The man is not praying, but instead revolving his hat between his fingers while he waits for his wife to finish her prayer...As for Millet, he did not go to church...<32>

Apparently, viewers in the past have read moral and political attitudes into this painting which the artist didn't intend. The artist was painting what he knew and understood, while others later injected notions of reform, or the fashionable dialectic between industry and nature.

Let us remember that in the beginning of the Russian Revolution artists thought that a radical new beginning in the art world would aid the purposes of the Revolution, but the strictness of the social ideology proved too narrow for the best artists and they either left Russia or produced a poor product.

If ethics is taken to be the basis of art and an artist must first be schooled in Unification Thought the formation of a Unificationist style will reflect its own theology and can be expected to give its own meaning to the terms "realism" and "idealism". But because of difficulties we have outlined in the field of aesthetics, it is no surprise that the Church has made such pervasive use of the camera lens in all its contemporary varieties. The lens can satisfy the demands of 'realism' while film and video editors can satisfy the requirements of 'idealism' as both terms are interpreted by the Church. Video editors and photographers, basing their work on the six attitudes required of artists, will infuse Unificationist art with a feeling for the enhancement of God's creation.

However, outside of photography, in architecture, sculpture painting, music, and literature, the problems confronting the Unificationist artist are more complex. The requirements of theology are so great that one can only wonder whether truly creative, individualistic imagination can flourish. It may be that the Church will remain as one of the most generous sponsors of the classic arts and leave experiments and the avant garde to others.

Yet, in the past, as in the Benedictine scriptoria of the twelfth century or the Persian manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth

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century, the very strictness of the requirements produced some of the world's most beautiful art works, each suffused with the ideals of the surrounding culture. We can hope that the future will produce Unificationist art endowed with the sweetness, the piety and the strength of vision of the high ideals of Unification Thought.

1 Ugo Spirito, "Esthetics", Encyclopedia of World Art, Vol.V, pp.28-74.

2 Dr. S.H. Lee, Foundations of Unification Thought, (Tentative title) Unpublished Mss., 1989.p. 1.

3 Dr. S.H. Lee, Explaining Unification Thought, N.Y. Unification Thought Institute, 1981.p.247.

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4 Outline of the Principle: Level 4, N.Y.: Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 1980. p.9.

5 Lee, EUT, p.8.

6 Ibid. p.19.

7 Philosophies of Art and Beauty, eds. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964. Phoenix Edition, 1976. p.141. This useful volume traces the essence of writings on aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger through both summary interpretations and original material.

8 Reverend Sun Myung Moon, Divine Principle, Washington, D.C.: The Holy Spirit Association For The Unification of World Christianity, 1973. p.41.

9 Ibid. p.41.

10 Outline, p. 23.

11 Lee, UT, p.246.

12 Ibid. p. 249.

13 Lee, UT, p.249.

14 Ibid. p.247.

10 Ibid. p.251.

16 Lee, Foundations of Unification Thought, p.6.

17 Lee, Explaining Unification Thought, pp.264-265.

18 Michael Sullivan, The Arts of China, revised edition, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979. p. 97.

19 Richard Ettinghausen, "Esthetics", Encyclopedia of World Art, Vol V, pp. 28-74.

20 Dr. Sang Hun Lee, Foundations of Unification Thought, Chapter 7, p. 5.

21 Ibid, p.5.

22 Dr. W. Windelband, A History of Philosophy, trans. James H. Tufts, New York: Macmillan Co., 1893. tenth printing, 1953. p.117-118.

23 Phil. of Art and Beauty, p. 140.

24 Ibid. p. 150. quoting from Plotinus, "Ennead", VI, ix, 9.

25 Hofstadter and Kuhns, Philosophies, p.556.

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27 "Meditations on a Hobby Horse", Aesthetics Today, N.Y.: New American Library, 1980. p.181.

28 "Art and Objecthood", Aesthetics Today, N.Y.: New American Library, 1980. p.231.

29 Paul J. Perry, "Art, Ethics and a Quiet Revolution in Value", Unification News, August, 1990. p.10.

30 Lee, Foundations of Unification Thought, p.19.

31 Lee, Explaining UT, p.273.

32 Robert L. Herbert, Jean-Francois Millet, Ex. Cat. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976. p.87. Roberts also tell us that Millet's Mother and Grandmother had died before the Angelus was begun, and they had been kept from the knowledge of his common-law wife and his many children who were not baptized for many years after their birth. He married his wife in the eyes of the church only a few days before he died.