

Editorial

Night Thoughts on the "Pietà"

On a recent Sunday at the Vatican a young Hungarian took an iron hammer from under his coat and assaulted the sensibilities and dreams of Western man. His was a cruel act—possibly political, certainly sophisticated, and more subtle in its conception than the mass murders committed by Charles Whitman and Charles Manson, or the crude assassinations performed or attempted by Oswald, Sirhan, Ray, Bremer.

These violent acts may sometimes appear to have been gratuitous, but they can also be read as messages to mankind, messages that share a common intent—to say that society is false, that man is lonely, that we are estranged from God. The young Hungarian, as he maimed Michelangelo's *Pietà*, shouted that *he* was Jesus Christ. And the figure

neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." I may be lukewarm about many political and religious issues, I may prize individual perceptions more than dogma of any sort, but nonetheless I feel . . . so many things.

A father remembers that long ago, as a college boy, drunk and disorderly in Rome, he spent his day at the Vatican paying cultural and religious dues and gazed upon the *Pietà* in a moment of sobriety and respect. It came to him then that this work of Michelangelo was *from the man's own hands* and that, although those hands had long since decayed, their heat and texture, the pressure of one man's energy, still vibrated upon the marble. The college boy had, that day, an experience with history, with art, and with a man he could love. He reflects tonight that his child will never know that precise experience.

The newspapers no longer remind us that a young man named Charles Whitman climbed to the top of the tallest tower in Austin, Texas, and fired bullets