

## Statement of Faith

Bertie Wood

My statement of faith is, in a way, just a long prayer.

Father, how can I indicate our relationship using words? Words come in this language or that, words carry mundane meanings that will interfere with the understanding of our precious relationship. But today it is my task to do just that, describe our closeness to these faithful, expectant individuals, so, with your help, I'll try.

As an adolescent in a non-church family in Atlanta, Georgia, I became conscious of your presence on occasional Sunday morning church visits with a neighborhood couple. Gradually, living with a handsome, talented, loving male parent who was sinking ever deeper into alcoholism, I began using the word "Father" when you and I spoke, and accepted from you the basic personal support that only a father can provide. Now,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a century later, as anti-sexism develops in the modern church, the name Father remains. I seem unable to readjust.

Like guidebooks for other religions, our Holy Bible demonstrates our efforts to explain the inexplicable. It contains the writings of multiple people who call you many different names and tell many different stories about you and about Jesus, a man totally dedicated to his relationship with you. The book is helpful, giving examples of loving behavior and exhortations for us to be our best selves. I presume that the chosen books of other religions do roughly the same thing. They try to respond to unanswerable questions like "Who made the world?" and provide guidance toward a satisfactory life-style. As a high schooler following her buddies into membership in the first Baptist Church of Rome, Georgia and participating with them in Youth for Christ, I read, on my own, the whole book. But my real faith was not to be found in the book. It was and is a quiet thing, ever present, totally supportive, unpronounceable beyond, "Thank you, Father."

"Thank you, Father," when the full moon bathes our neighborhood in soft light, when a warm telephone call comes in from a friend or a grandchild, when a red traffic signal turns to green as I approach. When the news is not so good, when I've made a major error, when someone is behaving in a way I cannot understand, the mantra becomes, "What'll I do now, Father?" and somehow your answer always makes sense. "You could respond this way, Bertie," or "You need to get more information, Bertie," or "That's the way it is, Bertie; accept it."

Thank you, Father. Thank you for providing a sense of serenity in this chaotic world. You give me a beautiful life, surrounded by reasonable people, conscious of opportunities to express a loving concern for different individuals and physically able to take positive action. At this very moment, thank you for this church, for these people, and for my place here among them.