

To Dare God

by Anne-Geri' Gray



The tragedy of the *Titanic* is a fascinating story of godless presumption.

"Not even God Himself could sink this ship," a White Star employee said at the launch of the *Titanic* on May 31, 1911.

Mystery and haunting romance have shrouded the untold stories of the great ship since its unthinkable demise after a collision with an iceberg in the early morning of April 14, 1912. Nearly a century later cinemas were sold out and moviegoers reserved their tickets early in order to relive the tragedy with fictitious Jack and Rose, lovers torn apart by human arrogance and icy cold water during what some consider to be the greatest maritime disaster in history.

A unique fascination for mass suffering has always existed, especially for the personal stories that accompany tragedies such as the Holocaust or the *Hindenburg*. Only the loss of the *Challenger* mirrors the same-scale surprise as the *Titanic*.

The wreck of the luxury liner, majestic queen of the White Star fleet, was a mere legend with stories pieced together from survivors and historians of our century. Unanswered questions remained and took refuge in a watery abyss for decades.

Then, in 1985, somewhere on the East Atlantic Rise, Dr. Robert Ballard's robot cameras spotted the great behemoth and gently awakened her from her slumber, hoping she had not slept off some of her secrets. Fascination peaked, bookstores refilled with sto-

ries of the past, old questions were asked, and the *Titanic* began to reveal some of her mysteries.

"It is difficult to understand why the owners and builders named this ship *Titanic*," read an editorial in the *Belfast Morning News* in June 1911. "The Titans were a mythological race who came to believe they'd conquered nature, who thought they'd achieved power and learning greater than Zeus himself, to their ultimate ruin."

The Titans dared Zeus and failed. Although their blight is mythological, it is also a reflection of age-old human arrogance and quest for godlike power. Has the human race ever dared God and failed?

Consider Genesis 11:3-9. "They said to each other, 'Come let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.' But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.' So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the

city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth" (NIV).

Disobedience in the garden was but the first in a torrent of pride that fatally unfolds everywhere in history. From the catastrophe of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-6), to the flood narrative (6-8) and the episode of the Tower of Babel, arrogance had become quite an epidemic. The Babel experience, a titanic disaster, was due to a presumptuous appetite to dare the Almighty or at least die trying.

When a woman who boarded the *Titanic* on its maiden voyage heard the claim that "God Himself could not sink this ship," she answered, "Well, that's flying in the face of humanity, isn't it?"

What pomposity would equip the gigantic boat with enough lifeboats for fewer than half its passengers? What pretension would love and worship a mere machine? What arrogance? Simply human.

Each of these stories, the Tower and the *Titanic*, in its own way casts light on what this cryptic break between God and humanity means and God's response to it.

At the turn of the 20th century, luxury, size and speed were major components in the growing industry of commercial travel. This influenced Bruce Ismay and others to construct a plan for a ship 50 percent larger than the world had ever known.