



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Stopping Too Soon

Eastern Air Lines Flight 163 is direct from JFK Airport in New York to Melbourne, with one stop in Tampa. As usual I had turned my seat and the area around it into an office, with papers spread out across the adjoining seat and books stacked in the aisle. Plane rides are one of the few times modern man can escape the ghost of Alexander Graham Bell and, aside from occasional emergency scares caused by an engine failure or an insane decision on the part of the co-pilot to put the plane into a barrel roll, most flights are calm, presenting a good time to work, sleep, read or just have a leisurely conversation with your wife. Since I was alone on this flight, I opted for work.

Normal lay-over time in Tampa on flight 163 is 25 minutes. However, after 40 minutes and still no sign of starting the engines to take off, I began to wonder if there were problems. Disentangling myself from my seatbelt and pulling my papers together in a crude pile, I walked forward to the door.

"Why the delay?" I asked the pretty stewardess.

"You won't believe this," she grinned. "We had three old Italian women on the plane who boarded the plane in New York for Melbourne. They had just arrived from Rome. None of them spoke English and this is their first trip to the states. I suppose they are visiting their family on the east coast. When we landed in Tampa they got off the airplane without our knowing about it. I suppose they thought they were in Melbourne. We didn't miss them until we started to take off. I've sent someone to see if they can find them. They're probably wandering around the airport."

I returned to my seat feeling good. I've been on some flights in other lands where the flight attendants would have been glad if you had gotten lost. Only in America would an airline bring everything to a screeching stop just to find three old women wandering around an airport.

They finally located them. They were riding the escalators, trying to figure out how to get out of the terminal. Since the stewardess could not speak Italian, she had

rushed off to find a baggage handler who had persuaded the women to return to the airplane — much against their wishes, I might add, for they were convinced someone was trying to ship them back to Italy.

It's a typical problem — getting off too soon. A lot of folks do that. Kids think they know it all and drop out of school. Adults close their minds to new ideas. Ask any public librarian and you'll learn the sad tale of how few people are still growing through the world of books. We prefer violence and sex on TV to good educational programs. We've stopped too soon.

Especially tragic are those who settle for a church service — or an Easter service at that — convinced that's all there is to spiritual matters. It's bad enough to get off in Tampa when your ticket is paid all the way to the east coast; but to settle for a church service when the entire Kingdom of God is waiting... well, old Italian ladies aren't the only ones who miss out.

Lord, send us more baggage handlers to explain there's more — we don't have much time left.