

Tail's Moral

June 14, 2008

On a recent transatlantic flight I saw displayed on the TV screens in the aeroplane's main cabin something I had never seen before: the constantly changing view over the front of the aeroplane as seen from a TV camera mounted outside at the back, no doubt high on the tailfin. It was an interesting perspective . . .

Of course the camera could only show always in the same position the forward fuselage and roots of the wings, it could not even show the flaps moving at the back of the wings to manoeuvre the monster bird up to its cruising height. Nevertheless as the machine picked its way between the clouds, how ungainly its movements seemed, when compared for instance with those of a seagull soaring on the wind and swooping over the surf with its entire body flexing at every moment in a variety of all instinctive ways!

However, one could not at the same time help admiring the enormous power being deployed by the monster bird as it forced so much weight upwards through the clouds against the pull of gravity. At least for now, oil alone has a sufficient ratio of energy to weight to make powered flight possible. But the ever expanding airports all over the world, veritable palaces of glass, steel and concrete, tell of the ever increasing number of flights, and such an increase can only mean the limited supply of fossil fuels being burnt up faster and faster. "Here today, gone tomorrow," are not those palaces doomed?

For over the last 150 odd years the industrial way of life whereby a welfare beggar of today can live as comfortably as a king of yesterday, has made itself more and more dependent on oil, and it has spread all over the world. India and China represent two giant populations demanding today their share in this "progress." But everything has its price, even

“progress.”

As oil makes for material comfort by taking out the need for many a physical effort, so the strain shifts from the muscles to the nerves, and so there tends to fade out that sense of reality which came with the discipline of labouring by the sweat of one's brow for food, warmth and clothing. More strain, less discipline, more unreality – disaster may be upon us even long before the oil runs out.

Kyrie eleison.