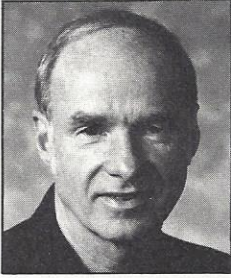


## THE LAST WORD



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### What If My Floppy Disk Flaps?

An article in *The Wall Street Journal* begins "Real men don't eat quiche. Real women don't pump gas. And real managers don't use computer terminals." The writer is saying that managers should manage people who in turn use computers.

"If you are the president of a company and you fly the corporate jet, it better be as a hobby. That task is best left to the corporate aviation service." The same principle, he says, applies to managers who use computer terminals. My problem is I wear two hats. As senior minister of a large church I am a manager. But as a writer, I am an airplane pilot.

Therefore, even though I have decided to computerize our church administration—and I'll have no problem letting others do that—as a writer I need to computerize myself. And that's downright frightening. This week, however, is the big turnover. Next Saturday my Apple IIe arrives and I will make the transition from typewriter to word processor.

Moving up to a computer is one of the major changes in my adult life. It is tantamount to moving from a horse-drawn carriage to an automobile. A racing car, at that. Both are forms of locomotion—but the similarities end there.

I suspect, for instance, that oats in the gas tank of a Trans-Am won't speed up the process of getting me to my destination. Yet it is just that procedure which I fear. Having said "Gee" and "Haw" to my typewriter all these years—and now being expected to deal with bytes, Ks and cursors—I could gum up my transportation process real good.

Yet I cannot discount the advice of my friends, all of whom tell me that once I get the hang of it I'll never want to go back. It started when Dennis Bennett, out in Seattle, began telling me about his computer. I discovered he had switched over—to speed up his writing. Yet when I checked back a year later it seemed Bennett was spending far more time under the hood than he was out on the road.

That intensified my fear. I've mastered the typewriter. I think with the ends of my fingers. To have to stop and figure out which key to punch to "bring something up," or which combination of keys to punch to make the printer produce what I have just put into memory . . . well, all that scares me.

Then there was the story of Jimmy Carter. After three days at a word processor typing out his memoirs, he punched the wrong key and erased everything. (There are some folks who wish he would do that with his four years in office.)

"Just make sure you transfer it over to your floppy disk," the expert told me. "Then if the power goes off you won't lose it."

But what if I have just received a word of prophecy, have not had time to transfer it to the floppy disk, and the prince of the air snatches it away with one power surge? Or, what if I do what Carter did and

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accidentally touch the "erase" key. Can I count on God doing for me what He did for Moses—and provide a duplicate set of the Ten Commandments?

Last fall I was in Jerusalem with a small group of men. One of them, my old friend Dallas Albritton from Tampa, Florida, pulled me aside. Dallas is a courtroom attorney with an opinion on many things. But he's also one of the few men who, when he says he has a word from God, I listen. He put his arm around my shoulder and standing in front of the Western Wall said, "God has said you are to buy a word processor."

The next day my friend Stan Elrod, a building contractor from Charlotte, North Carolina, told me the same thing. Well, two words from the Lord in Jerusalem! That's pretty sacred. So I came home and started looking. I've discovered several things. One, whatever you expected from your computer there's one that will do it better for less. Two, whatever you get from your computer, it won't be as much as someone else is getting.

On these two rules hang the law and profits.

But after wading through the jungle of mine-cando-it-better-than-yours, I have settled on an Apple. Next month this column will come to you at 700 words per minute—which is about seven times faster than I can think.

The thing I fear most is change. I've grown accustomed to my horse and buggy. Having my words appear on a little screen, having them jump around at my command until they are in place, checking them against my electronic dictionary, and then having them spewed out of a printer behind my back . . . well, it's a bit frightening.

Yet despite my misgivings, I firmly believe God is interested in efficiency, quality and increased productivity. Churches fought indoor plumbing, electric wiring, sound systems (some of us still suspect sound systems are of the devil) and speaking in tongues. But God is a God of change—whether we are or not.

It's the new wineskins which bother me—not the new wine. After 51 years on horseback, slipping behind the wheel of a race car requires a period of adjustment. After that, I'll be back faster than ever.

That is, if I don't hit the erase key. ↪