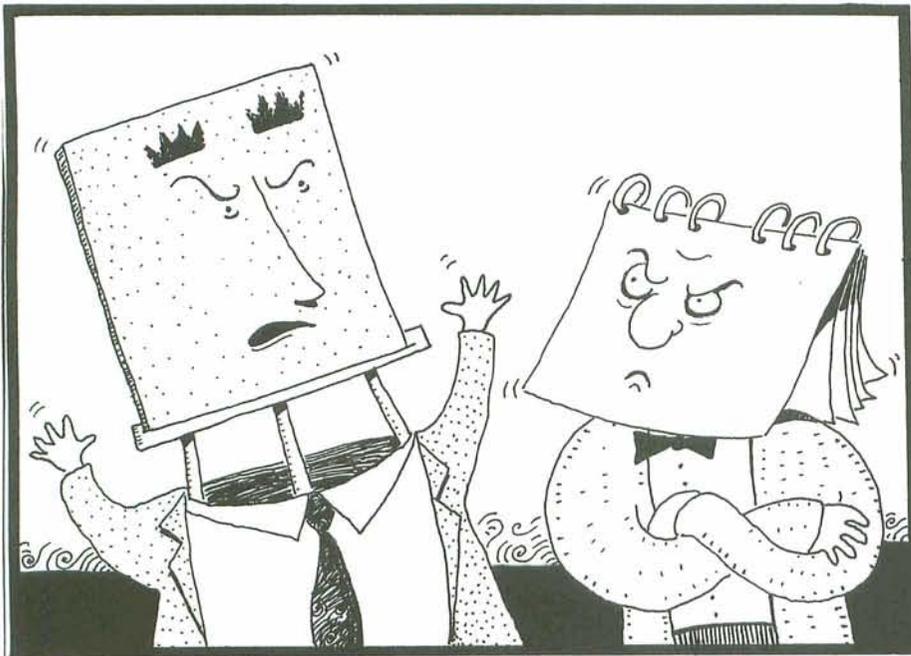


LIGHTER MINDS

FLANNEL BOARDS AND FLIP CHARTS

By Peter Sorensen



Rolled up, flannel boards look like iron rods;
when opened they are two-dimensional
—a perfect metaphor for Mormon Conservatives.

AS AUGUST ROLLS inevitably around, it brings scorching heat and, unfortunately, the equally inevitable Bloodstone Symposium. You may have read a report of mine a few years back on the traditional bloodletting at Bloodstone, but I now have ample time to catch you up on recent Bloodstone developments, for I am recovering from a complicated surgery in which an elders quorum presidency removed an entire blue plate special consisting of barbecued beef, corn on the cob and cole slaw, and replaced it with backbone and intestinal fortitude.

The current Bloodstone debate centers on choosing new metaphors for liberals and conservatives in the Church. As you will recall, in the sixties, the groups were called, respectively, "liahonas" and "iron rodders."

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These terms are now passé, so the Conference Subcommittee on Committees for the Subcommittee's Committee on Subcommittees concluded in secret ballot (which is still being located) to rename conservative Mormons "flannel boards" and liberals "flip charts."

You who were missionaries, or just pretended to be, will recognize the symbolic tools of the craft. Collapsible flannel boards, no longer used to teach investigators, were popular with green missionaries who had difficulty moving their hands in a foreign language. Most exciting was the impressive apostles and prophets foundation with the hidden flannel tongue that, when the cornerstone was taken off the board, forced a skyscraper of elders and priests to fall on the unsuspecting investigator's carpet. Flannel boards, when rolled up, look for all the world like an iron rod, which makes them

ideal conservative symbols. Unfortunately, rolled up flannel boards also look like three-pound blood sausages, and one missionary was poisoned twenty-two years ago when he was accidentally served a plate of flannel board *au gratin*. The flannel board also is not unlike an overripe zucchini, and has recently been chosen as the official metaphor for the FFA. Be that as it may, the flannel board is an entirely appropriate metaphor for Mormon conservatives. When opened, a flannel board is two-dimensional, reflecting the depth of most conservatives, I am sure you will agree, and serving as an aperitif tray when laid horizontally. Since flannel boards are no longer used, conservative Mormons and their ideas are depicted frozen in an unchanging past, making them a fit subject for such painters as Harry Anderson, if he likes alfalfa sprouts, or Arnold Friberg, if he is built like Mr. Universe. (Which brings up another issue. Why is Arnold Friberg's Abinadi built better than Rambo? I bet I'm half Abinadi's age, and I have maybe one quarter his physique!)

Similarly, the metaphor for liberals, the contemporary missionary flip chart, is equally appropriate: the flip chart is slick and bendable, two qualities every liberal Mormon needs if he's going to make it through a bishop's interview. Then, of course, the chart flips either backwards or forwards, which nicely reflects the post-structuralist lack of closure that is the hallmark of liberal thought. (For instance, a liberal was recently arrested outside a restroom at general conference for lack of closure. He was cited for indecent exposure, which was merely a conservative ploy, since the man's only real crime was failing to put a paper bag over his exceptionally ugly head.) Last of all, if you flip enough pages on the chart, you end up where you started; this corresponds to the fact that enough circular progressive and enlightened thought will eventually leave us with all the constancy and determination of a plate of creamed herring.

Despite the subcommittee's choices, however, the general assembly of the Bloodstone Symposium reacted unfavorably to the new proposals. One participant had the nerve to suggest one could be conservative about some things and liberal about others—you know, be devout and still hold an advanced degree from a school in California. That touched off some serious fireworks.

Professor Demure, holder of the Wimp Chair at the University of Washington, was outraged: "Choose you this day which party you will serve, whether it be the Neoprottestants or the Charismatics; be ye politically

correct, even as my father, who was college dean, was politically correct!"

Professor Fraustgyrdle, representing the feminist critics, concurred: "The only pluralism we will endorse is monism! And that's final."

"Nothing is final," declared DeMan Tanner, a rabid deconstructionist from Piltown U.

Professor Backlash, a religion professor who singlehandedly altered the credentials of the entire physical sciences faculty at Utah State said, "Here we have the quintessential flip-chart Mormons—always unwilling to coexist with us flannel boards. Boy, somebody oughta have your temple recommend for this!"

Shot back Professor Demure, "Look, you glorified seminary teacher with an Ed.D., I got my Ph.D. from Harvard, and my publications vita is as long as your arm."

"I'll bet it's not as long as your rap sheet!" shouted Backlash.

"I'll rap you!" said Demure, knocking Backlash over with his flip chart. Before he fell, however, the cagey religion teacher jammed a fast flannel board to Demure's solar plexus.

Rather than chronicle the free-for-all that ensued (as it does every season) where blood flowed like cheap sack as flannelboards were used as broad swords and flip charts as bucklers, I will provide a casualty list for those whom the hospitals and morgues failed to notify. (Remains will be forwarded to families, but strictly COD; the Bloodstone Foundation has a tight budget, after all.)

An entire contingent of visiting Yale deconstructionists were caught in a protest rally, and got buried in the "difference" between signified and signifier; DeMan Tanner bled to death because he would not allow paramedics to achieve closure on one of his arteries.

A group of Revisionist historians from the West Coast performed a strong misreading of the symposium program, and they all fell headlong into each other in the foyer when all the sessions of the three-day event suddenly converged. Orwell Marx, chair of the Church history session and a descendant of the great Marx himself (Gummo), was lanced by a Mormon satirist's rapier wit.

A small coterie of transcendentalist charismatics died of stigmata.

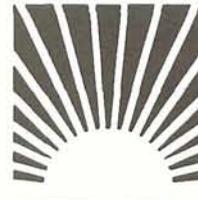
A group of Libertarians were crushed leaning too far to one side. Last of all a large group of traditionalist conservatives were demolished for failing to yield.

LOOKING TOWARD NEXT YEAR: We would like to fill the void—created by the

death of all these intellectuals—with a large group of Mormon lawyers, who seem to have achieved the greatest ability of any educated Mormons to cash in on their ability to manipulate the English language, with the possible exception of certain cosmetics salespeople and steel magnates. Submit all symposium proposals to Sneed Hearn, c/o

Bloodstone Symposium. You may be assured your proposals will be given prompt attention by Mr. Hearn, who has only recently returned from the dead.

I'm sure we're all looking to the day when missionaries use color monitors and video laser discs to teach the gospel. What will that represent? ☒



OF SACRIFICE A SHRINE

1877

When word came that there was to be a temple nearby, at Manti, Great-grandfather left, for a time, his meager harvest, to quarry stone. Then each massive square was shaped with care, for each must be perfect—or as near perfect as the human hand could make it. Walls must be strong that bind eternity in—and the world out.

And Great-grandmother stole precious hours from making cheese and dying wool and keeping ten perpetually hungry children full to gather rags soon loomed into carpets for the hallowed halls. She wove them tenderly, with care, for each piece must be perfect—or as near perfect as the human hand could make it. For on these hand-loomed threads might tread the Living God or her loved dead or her own children on the day that they would wed.

1977

Word came that there would be a temple near me, too, in Bellevue, and I longed to get my hands into the warp and weft of it. But well I knew that stones for these walls would not be hewn in a nearby quarry, but would come, pre-fabricated, from a far-off factory. Oh, they would be beautiful and shine, and the workmanship thereof would be exceeding fine, and they would be perfect—or as near perfect as machines can make them. Walls must still be strong that bind eternity in—and the world out.

No rags are needed here for these carpets will be made by Lees and come in thirteen colors. Yes, they will be perfect—or as near perfect as machines can make them. For on this inch-thick plush might tread the Living God or our loved dead or our own children on the day that they will wed.

—INGRID FUHRIMAN