



E. E. ERICKSEN

LOYAL HERETIC

Scott Kenney

Even in high Church councils, Ephraim Ericksen spoke his mind. His views sometimes cut across the grain of tradition, but they were well considered and for a time, seemed just what was needed.

Ericksen's crusading spirit was acquired in childhood. His father served three missions for the Church and six months in prison for "the principle." And as his education, which ranged from the Oneida Stake Academy to the University of Chicago, brought him into contact with modern thought, Ephraim's zeal turned naturally and whole-heartedly to educating the Saints.

In the days before truth was correlated, some believed there was much in "the world" which would promote the cause of Mormonism. B. H. Roberts challenged young Mormons to acquire the academic skills and credentials to rout their critics, so Ephraim set off in 1908 for Chicago. When he returned, his head was full of pragmatism, social gospel, evolution, and higher criticism. Nonetheless, he quickly rose to prominence in Church education, and though he was later eased out of ecclesiastical positions, his influence persists to this day.

In 1965, two years before his death, the University of Utah established the E. E. Ericksen Chair of Philosophy,

and recently reprinted his 1918 dissertation, *The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life*. In the reprint's "Introduction," Ericksen's protege Sterling M. McMurrin wrote, "His was the first and last generation of authentic Mormon liberals, and he was their foremost philosophical spokesman."

The liberal Mormon, concluded Thomas O'Dea, "can choose only between submission and personal disquietude or apostasy and suffering the guilt of deserting the tradition in which he has been reared and to which he feels great attachment."¹ Though some considered him an apostate, to his dying day E. E. Ericksen thought of himself as a loyal Mormon. No one ever accused him of submissiveness, and as for personal disquietude, Ericksen's answer was given in 1937: "Religion is a crusade, not a consolation."²

Early Life

He was the second child of Bendt Jensen Ericksen's fifth wife, Anna Sophia Danielsen, and his father named him Ephraim Edward. His early childhood memories were of the one-room cabin and dry farm in Preston, Idaho, where two of his father's three living wives and their seven children eked out a living. Even by pioneer standards they were poor—they had to kill the family dogs when there was nothing left to feed them, and bread and milk were standard supper fare.

In southern Idaho, Danes were on the bottom of the social ladder. Despite Bendt's devotion to the Church, he and his family were "Danish"—a term of derision. Ephraim remembered no friends in school; even the teachers ridiculed the Ericksens' "foreign" ways.

Working the farm, the railroad, and the canal, Ephraim was able to attend school only three or four months each year. But he graduated from the tenth grade at the age of twenty-one and with his brother Alma left for the Brigham Young College in Logan, coincidentally situated on the site of the old Church farm where Ephraim had been born, 2 January 1882.

He worked as a janitor to pay tuition and support his widowed mother. He owned only one change of clothes, but his athletic prowess and good-natured humor soon won many friends. His dogged persistence in academic achievements won their respect, and he was elected student body president.

Professor Mosiah Hall had been a student of John Dewey; he introduced Ephraim to the ideas of his mentor, the man who would become Ephraim's model philosopher, and led him into critical biblical schol-

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Appreciation is expressed to Edna Ericksen for access to the Ericksen papers, which constitute the major source of this study. Also to the library staffs of the University of Utah, Utah State University, and Church Historical Department for supplemental material.

The Ericksen papers include, "Ephraim Edward Ericksen: His Memories and Reflections," a 302-page autobiographical typescript written in 1954-55; "Bendt Jensen Ericksen," Ephraim's 1955 biography of his father; the uncompleted "Mormonism in Philosophic Perspective;" correspondence, lecture notes, reports, and copies of all Ericksen's published works. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations and incidents cited are contained in this collection, primarily in "Memories and Reflections." YMMIA general board minutes are also cited according to the dates indicated in the text.

¹Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago, 1957), p. 234.

²E. E. Ericksen, *Social Ethics* (Garden City, New York, 1937), p. 287.

In 1908 Ericksen set off for Chicago to study philosophy and prove Mormonism to the world.

arship. Professor William H. Chamberlin, recently returned from Berkeley, where he had studied personal idealism under George H. Howison, taught the farmboy only one course—but that was enough: "This type of philosophy . . . struck me as just another way of saying, 'The soul of man is eternal.' It was Mormon doctrine taught by a philosopher." And it appealed to Ephraim's Mormon missionary zeal: "My home and school environment had already implanted in me the desire to preach and teach Mormonism, and now a philosopher comes along to tell me that religion is philosophy and philosophy is religion. It was practically impossible for me to resist the call to become a teacher of philosophy."

And Elder B. H. Roberts delivered a sermon at the BYC that confirmed the decision as he challenged the students to answer the scholars' criticism of the Church. "I shall accept the challenge," Ericksen said to himself.

Since both Hall and Chamberlin had attended the University of Chicago, renowned as John Dewey's forum, in the fall of 1908 Ericksen set off with his brother Alma (who was to become a lawyer) to study philosophy at Chicago and prove Mormonism to the world.

The Church was Ericksen's reason for graduate studies and during the Chicago years he often accompanied missionaries to their teaching appointments. On Sunday afternoons the Utah students met in the Ericksen apartment for "vigorous and sometimes heated discussions on religion." Among the participants: Harvey Fletcher, Henry D. Moyle, Leon Fannesbeck, Heber J. Sears, Albert E. Bowen, and Leroy E. Cowles.

But Ericksen's ideas about religion were changing. After his first year, he decided, "My year in philosophy had certainly not destroyed my basic religious convictions. I was ready to give up some of the traditional beliefs about miracles . . . and that there was only one true church . . . but I continued to believe in the existence of God . . . that he loved human beings everywhere and that the sincere effort of persons and of organized groups to advance the true and the beautiful and just expresses God's will." This had been Chamberlin's religious philosophy, and "to me it was Mormonism at its best."

Church school system superintendent Horace H. Cummings thought otherwise. He informed Ericksen that "the philosophy I was being taught at the University of Chicago was not the kind that was wanted by my Church" and "that should I be given a position in the Church school system I would be in for trouble." The warning was not idle—in February 1911 the famous BYU controversy came to a head; Henry and Joseph Peterson and Ralph V. Chamberlin, though acknowledged by Cummings to be "perhaps the strongest men in the institution . . . from an educational standpoint," were forced to resign because of their insistence on teaching evolution and higher criticism.

Ericksen's controversial interpretation of Mormonism produced praise and condemnation.

Ephraim was serious in his desire to teach in the Church school system, so he acted on Cummings's advice and transferred to economics, still "holding fast to my philosophy," for "it appeared to me at that time that a man of Mr. Cummings's type may not continue as head of the system, and that the attitude of the Church toward science and philosophy may change. . . .

"I regarded Church leaders as good men with whom I might reason to the extent of convincing them that my philosophy was just what was needed. It was probably the teachings of William H. Chamberlin and my own youthful spirit that made me thus optimistic; or it may have been my faith in Mormonism as divine in origin and destiny."

His professors in Chicago were of unusually high caliber, and the impression they made on him was unforgettable.³ James Tufts, the department head who obtained a scholarship for Ericksen within days of his arrival, introduced the young man to the evolution of morality, stressing the development of Old Testament ethics and ritual and laying the foundation for Ericksen's acceptance of higher criticism, reverence for the ethical teachings of Jesus and the higher prophets, evolutionary view of religious history, and belief in ritual as symbol.

From Edward S. Ames, Ericksen appropriated the idea that religious leaders "were in large measure created by their people" rather than "by nature," and from George H. Mead, he learned that the self is a social being that develops in and emerges from interaction with other selves, rather than an independent, self-sufficient entity.

The Student Becomes a Teacher

In 1910 Ephraim returned to Utah and married his BYC sweetheart Edna Clark.⁴ The next year, with their first child on the way, he accepted the post of principal of the Church's Murdock Academy in Beaver, Utah

³James H. Tufts co-authored *Ethics*, the standard text at Chicago, with Dewey in 1908. Sydney E. Ahlstrom designates Edward S. Ames as "the country's most widely read psychologist" of the period. (*A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven, 1972, p. 906). And George H. Mead, a student of Josiah Royce, had, according to John Dewey, "the most original mind in philosophy in the America of the last generations. . . . I attribute to him the chief force in this country in turning psychology away from mere introspection and aligning it with biological and social facts and conceptions." (Ericksen memoirs, p. 118.)

⁴Edna Clark was born 19 November 1889 to Hyrum D. and Ann Eliza Porter Clark in Star Valley, Wyoming. She raised five children while serving one year in the Utah House of Representatives and six in the State Senate. She was a champion of women's rights legislation and presided over the commission, execution and installation of the Brigham Young statue in the nation's capitol. As Ephraim said, "She was the only woman ever to put Brigham in his place."

The major accomplishment of her service on the Primary general board (1920-39) was the founding of the Trail Builder program.

Crippled for the last fifteen years of his life, Ephraim received the best possible care from his wife. During his last bed-ridden years the almost constant care she rendered so patiently and tenderly is a tribute to the remarkable character of the woman Ephraim married.

which serviced all Latter-day Saints in the southwest quarter of the state—a four-year high school, elementary school, teachers' college, and reformatory. His task was not only to educate but also "to save young souls wherever they may be found." With characteristic drive and enthusiasm Ephraim and Edna entered into their responsibilities—he as principal, teacher, fund-raiser, branch counselor, athletic coach; she as substitute mother, nursemaid, midwife, and entertainer.

Murdock Academy was housed in abandoned Fort Cameron. Apostle Francis M. Lyman had told the Saints that someday Murdock would become the great institution of higher learning in southern Utah. The foundation for a three-story building had been laid, but funding dried up and construction had stopped.

Shortly after Ericksen arrived, however, the old assembly hall burned to the ground. "Some may have thought that this was my personal contribution to the cause, but I swear I did not do it. Yet all—students, faculty, and principal, seemed to enjoy the big fire. More than that, they whispered, 'We may now get the new building completed.'"

Brother Lyman visited the site and was reminded of his prediction. The Church renewed funding and a two-story stone academy was completed.

Ericksen was a popular and outspoken principal. On three occasions he was reprimanded by high Church officials "for my attempting to make the school more important than the whole Church." At one stake conference, Ephraim was called upon to speak. "I preached a sermon on 'the eternal glory of education' and on the sacred mission of the Murdock Academy." He stressed the importance of boys finishing high school so that when they went into the mission fields they could go anywhere—even to the universities—and preach Mormonism without fear or apology. When he finished, Elder Joseph W. McMurrin of the First Council of Seventy arose and cautioned the congregation that when the Brethren had a message for the Saints it would come from a general authority; that what was needed was a strong testimony, not worldly knowledge; that what mattered was a spiritual witness—the grammar and vocabulary were not so important.

But the apostle of education continued to bear strong witness. "I know the Gospel is true—insofar as it is interpreted correctly." And that meant "faith, charity, and education. These three, and the greatest of these is education."

In 1914 Ephraim was granted a leave of absence from the Academy and completed his course work at Chicago. In 1915 he began his thirty-five-year career at the University of Utah, first as assistant professor of philosophy, later as department head, and finally as dean.

Since the summer of 1910, Ephraim and Edna had been gathering material for a dissertation. They interviewed old pioneers who remembered the Utah War, the United Order, and "the raid," and they received help and encouragement from U. of U. President John A. Widtsoe and Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, then Church historian.

In 1918 Ephraim completed his dissertation and passed the doctoral exams in both economics and



The Ericksens 1912

philosophy. The University of Chicago required that dissertations be published, but the Ericksen household had grown to five, and the necessary \$300 was not available until 1922. When it was finally published, *The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* received favorable reviews and the few hundred copies were soon sold out. The *London Times* praised Ericksen and his work, and *The Survey* commented: "His recommendations for bringing Mormon life more in harmony with American conceptions of democracy are particularly valuable because they are based on a sympathetic evaluation of the lasting good in the original ideals and the historical development of the group. . . . It is to be hoped that this sane and idealistic analysis will have its influence eventually on the reconstruction of Mormonism."

Of course, most Latter-day Saints were not interested in a revisionist view of Mormonism, but a few friends, such as Joseph Peterson, sent congratulations and encouragement: "Your book is . . . in eventual results more beneficial to the Mormon people than is a treatment such as . . . others would want. . . . Don't let their depreciation dishearten you . . . you have a real mission there and in time will be recognized, as you are now by many, as a real constructive agent in Utah problems. The Mormon people are well meaning and liberal in

many ways; it is your right to fight for their future good and intellectual freedom."

As Peterson indicated, the book was not well received in some circles. It was reported to Ericksen that Dr. Widtsoe had "declared it to be historically and scientifically unsound" to members of the BYU faculty. It was on sale for only a few hours at the Deseret Bookstore before it was hastily taken off the shelves and returned to the publisher.

Mormon Group Life simply was not the historical interpretation most Mormons were accustomed to. It viewed the development of Mormonism not as the result of divine revelation, but as the product of adjustments occasioned by social and economic crises. While he allowed that "Joseph Smith possessed the essential traits of a prophet," Ericksen's understanding of "prophet" was not the traditional Mormon view. Joseph, he maintained, was made a prophet not only for the early Saints but by them as well. "He received his inspiration from the group and in turn reflected its life in such a way as to give it restimulation. . . . It is true that the whole life of the people was centered in their prophet, but it is equally true that the spirit and power of the prophet came from the group."

Historically, Ericksen divided his study into three periods of "maladjustment:" between Mormons and

The twentieth-century: conflict between new thought and old institutions.

Gentiles, Mormons and Nature, and New Thought and Old Institutions. He admired Joseph's sensitivity to the spiritual and emotional needs of his people in creating the new religion. And he praised Brigham's practical genius in overcoming the environment and founding a state. But he was not encouraged by the response of Church leaders to the third challenge.

The present crisis, as Ericksen viewed it, had been rising since the turn of the century. It was an internal conflict between new modes of scientific and social thought, and the old institutions of authoritarianism. He criticized the hierarchial structure as undemocratic and found tithing inequitable. But it was the "sell-out" of traditional communitarian values to the capitalistic profit motive that Ericksen criticized most severely:

"There is a growing tendency to take sides with the capitalistic class and with large corporations against the laboring classes. The philosophy of the church leaders was at one time radical and socialistic; it is now conservative and capitalistic. . . . The United Order is as far from their minds as is socialism from the minds of the owners of large corporations."

Joseph and Brigham had instituted Church industry for the benefit of all members; now it was operated for the profit of the few at the expense of the majority. Church members, whose tithes and offerings financed Church businesses, had little or no voice in the enterprises.

Finally, Ericksen found Mormonism to be undergoing a hardening of the arteries. "What Mormonism needs today," he wrote, "is the vitalization of its institutions, which need to be put into use rather than merely contemplated. . . . When Mormonism finds more glory in working out new social ideals than in the contemplating of past achievements or the beauty of its own theological system, it will begin to feel its old-time strength."

In Church Administration

Paradoxically, in 1922, the year these lines were published, E. E. Ericksen was called to the general board of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association. In November the First Presidency assigned to the MIA's "The chief responsibility for regulation of recreational activities," and Ericksen was given his first official opportunity to "work out new social ideals" on a Churchwide basis. He was appointed chairman of the new joint (Young Men and Young Ladies) Recreation Committee.

To Ephraim Ericksen recreation was not just "fun and games." Overcoming that mentality was one of his first priorities: "There are certain attitudes of mind that have come down to us from away back in medieval times and from the Puritan period. . . . Many good people who are willing to tolerate recreation as a sort of harmless enjoyment are unwilling to give it the positive educational and spiritual function which we are undertaking to assign to it. . . . The soul of man, we are taught, is a union of body and spirit. . . . In the activities such as running, jumping, boxing, wrestling, dancing, and the spon-

aneous life expressed in play and song are genuine expressions of the inner life of youth. Since these activities are true expressions of human nature, they constitute the best basis upon which a substantial character program can be founded."⁵

His first year with the YMMIA was one of intense preparation. Then, in October 1923, he announced a Churchwide series of ten weekly recreation leadership lessons. In November the recreation committee began previewing motion pictures recommended for showing in Church meetinghouses. In December, "Standards for Social Dancing" (including a lengthy denunciation of jazz) was published.

Recreation soon became the largest committee of the MIA. "In fact," Ericksen recalled, "we were accused of attempting to create the philosophy, determine the policy and the program of the entire board. We were going too fast to please the more conservative folk. 'Testimony of the Gospel is the purpose of this organization, not marble-playing.' 'We are permitting the tail to wag the dog,' were typical expressions. But we had on our side the Superintendency (George Albert Smith, Richard R. Lyman, and Melvin J. Ballard). And we continued."

By 1926, hundreds of Mormon youth who had earned the right to compete in Churchwide contests at the ward, stake, and regional levels converged for annual June conferences in Salt Lake City to vie for awards in poetry and essay writing, vocal quartets and choruses, orchestra, band, drama, ballroom dancing, folk dancing, instrumental and vocal solos, junior boys and girls choruses, fife and drum, debate, retold story, declamation, field and track, creative arts, music memory, van ball, and basketball.

In 1928 priesthood and MIA meetings, both held on Tuesday nights, were restructured to eliminate competing activities. After a fifteen-minute devotional, the men went to priesthood quorums and the women to YLMIA classes for forty-five minutes. The final hour was for joint MIA activities. Friday afternoon and evening were also devoted to MIA recreation.

Under this arrangement Ericksen felt that Church history, doctrine, and testimony belonged to the priesthood section, leaving the MIA free to concentrate on social interaction. But other board members disagreed. The Church had entered the recreation business as a means to reclaim youth from pool halls, debating clubs, fraternal orders, and other secular organizations. Scouting (adopted in 1911) and recreation had become the dominant features of YMMIA, and to some it was getting out of hand.

To Ericksen there was no conflict. The MIA's "sacred mission" was the development of well-rounded, moral personalities in a context of social justice and opportunity. Detractors of recreation simply failed to recognize the unity of spiritual and temporal experiences. Thus, for years there persisted a division between the social spiritualizers and the gospel spiritualizers. Fortunately, differences were usually smoothed over and the board functioned with remarkable harmony.

After more than eight years of chairing the recreation and community activities committees, Ericksen was called to create an experimental senior department en-

⁵M.I.A. *Hand Book* (Salt Lake City, 1928), pp. 30-31.

compassing men and women twenty-four to thirty-five. Ericksen and Elsie Talmage Brandley wrote the first manual, *Challenging Problems of the Twentieth Century*, published in the midst of the Depression.

From the standpoint of content, method, and sources, the manual is exceptional, if not unique, in LDS literature. It emphasized social problems and cultural enrichment, largely ignoring gospel fundamentals. Numerous non-Mormon articles were included as suggested readings, and members were encouraged to look beyond the Church as well as within for social direction.

For example, in the lesson "Religion and the New Intellectual Life" Ericksen wrote: "Religion is not to be defined as a system of beliefs or as any special type of rituals or institutions. It is a way of living in which in its inner aspect is seen the spiritual and purposive control of life and in its outer aspects is seen in its active participation in the promotion of the highest ideals of life. . . . With such a definition of religion, science and philosophy become not its enemies but its most loyal friends. When, in the true spirit of investigation, new and more adequate interpretations of nature, of human life, and social institutions come into being, religious faith is stimulated to seek for a finer and brighter future. It also provides more adequate tools with which to work in preserving and promoting the finer values."

The accompanying discussion questions are indicative of the manual as a whole:

"1. What are some of the new intellectual achievements that impose a reconstruction on traditional religious thought?"

"2. Can you support the proposition: the controversy which is going on under the name of religion and science is not in reality between these two great fields of experience, but a battle between new thought and old institutions?"

"3. Does religion have the responsibility to settle questions of scientific and intellectual character?"

"4. Is the responsibility of religion to prepare men (a) for life, (b) for death, or (c) for both life and death?"

"5. Is the function of religion to conserve old beliefs or create new values?"

"6. Is the Bible a textbook to guide science or is it a history of the development of the spiritual life?"

"7. Which is more nearly the function of religion: (a) to conserve inherited beliefs, (b) to promote new and more adequate scientific ideas, or (c) to employ new scientific and philosophical ideas in the interest of finer faith and more abundant living."

The experimental year was a success, and the popular but controversial manual was expanded for 1932-33, "supplemented with Latter-day Saint literature." Again the authors dealt with a wide range of social issues: trends in education, unemployment, community health, family life, leisure time, isolationism in foreign policy, religious change, social injustice and capitalism. The modernist approach was retained:

"The new conditions of social and economic life tend to render old standards obsolete. We have within a century passed from a life highly individualistic and domestic to one requiring cooperative effort. And with this change have come new standards of social duty, new moral obligations."

Members were encouraged to look beyond the Church, as well as within, for direction.

Again the program was popular, and in March 1932 another course was approved, "Social Changes and Spiritual Values." Seven areas were to be covered: Changes in Economic Life, National and International Movements, Movements in Community Welfare, Developments in Education, Movements in Recreation and Leisure Time, The Family, and Faith in the Age of Science.

In January 1933 an investigating committee reported "that a survey made of the stakes relative to the present [senior department] program showed only three unfavorable reports out of twenty-nine."

Progressives on the board were riding high. Ericksen headed the senior department, and two of his allies were also department heads: Herbert B. Maw, dean of men at the University of Utah and later governor of Utah, was chairman of the M-Men, and Arthur L. Beeley, head of anthropology and sociology at the university, was chairman of the adult department. A letter to Ericksen from a liberal colleague on the board dated 14 May 1933 reveals the attitude of several:

"I was delighted recently to get your interesting and newsy letter, commenting so critically—yet constructively—on things at home. I share with you that same feeling about our common life. We long ago ceased to 'cross the plains,' it seems to me. Why, of all people, we should be so conservative and backward in social development during these times is hard for me to see. Whatever the ultimate reasons are, certain it is that the policy of the Church (and therefore the State) is wholly determined by old men whose outlook is retrospective, and whose conception is the pre-modern, anti-scientific one. If there is ever to be a renaissance of Mormonism it must come soon or it will be too late. Moreover, it will have to come through a drastic shift in policy and a courageous realignment of social and moral values. For instance, it's about time we had an international conscience in the Church. Notwithstanding our missionary system, with its thousands of returned missionaries from most parts of the civilized countries of the world, we are still a parochial lot. Once we can shift our emphasis from the word of wisdom and tithing, etc., to such issues as world peace, raising of educational standards, we shall, I think, begin to make progress and 'restore the ancient faith.' But this is heresy, so our colleagues of the Board and the Quorum would say!

"I am afraid I can never be again content to subscribe to the existing social and economic program of the Church. This year abroad has convinced me of the imperative need of social planning for the 'here and now.' Civic education, with a local, a national and an international objective, it seems to me, is the great need; not only in Utah, but throughout America and the Western world. But why not begin in Utah! The term Mormon might just as easily (in fifty years from now) connote social planning, unique social and educational institutions, as it now suggests polygamy. . . . Moreover, if such objectives are to be realized, the initiative must be

taken by the younger, vigorous men like ourselves. It is too much to ask the 'authorities' to undertake it."

Whatever hopes the iconoclasts might have entertained about remaking the Church were quickly dashed, however, as events of 1933 brought about a change in the intellectual leadership of the Church and an emphatic denunciation of the liberal atmosphere which had permitted such notions to germinate. In April, President Heber J. Grant reached outside the quorums of general authorities to pick J. Reuben Clark, former Ambassador to Mexico, as his Second Counselor. In July, James E. Talmage passed away; in September, B. H. Roberts. In November, Apostle John A. Widtsoe returned from six years as president of the European Mission and four months later was called to be commissioner of education for the Church.

Ericksen had clashed with Clark years before when the philosopher had campaigned for the League of Nations on the University of Utah campus. The two men's attitudes on education, religion, and politics were diametrically opposed.

In late October President Clark made some remarks which created an uproar on the general boards.

"We should ask the First Presidency to revise our assignment or officially give us new instructions as to our field," declared Axel A. Madsen.

"We should make a clean sweep of our two boards, honorably releasing at least fifty percent of the older members," said Ann N. Cannon.

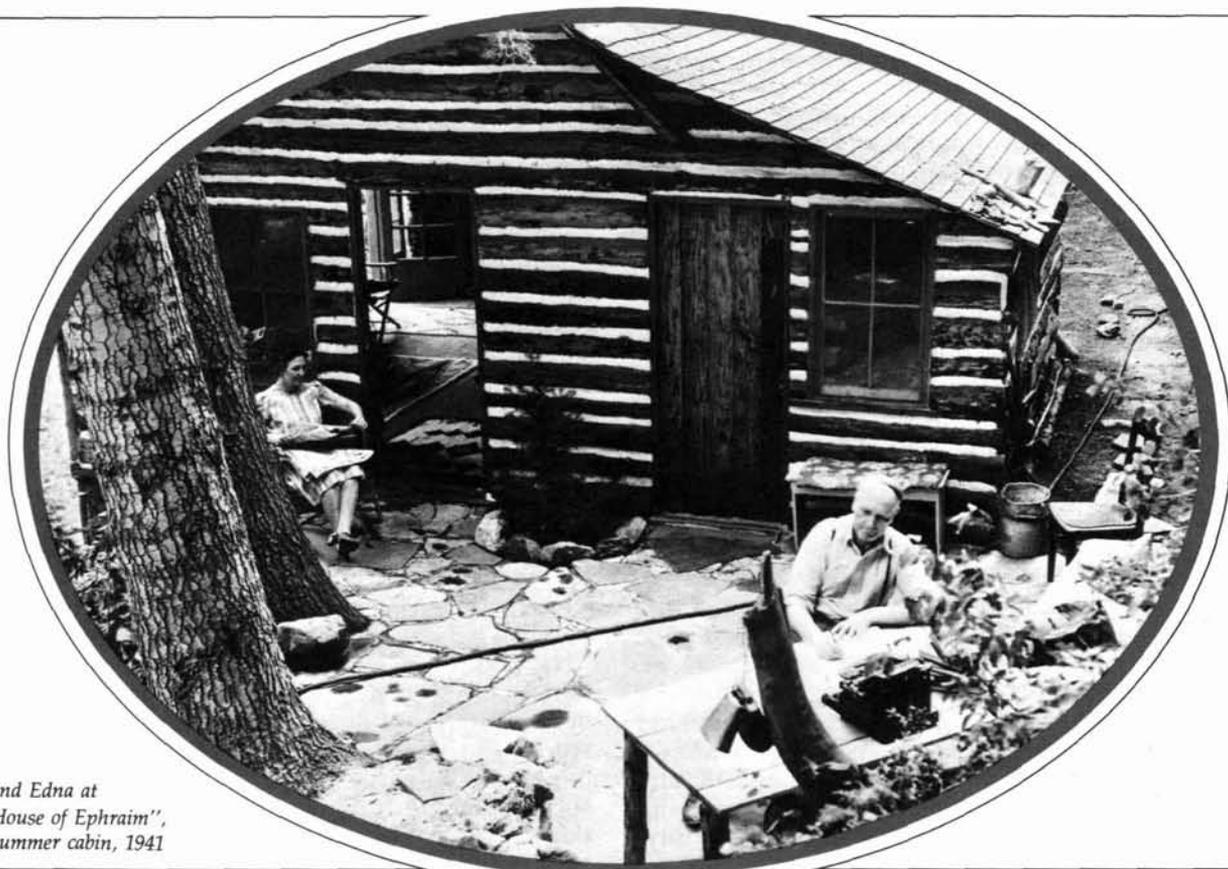
"We must analyze our programs and know what are our fundamentals. . . . We all work in committees until

we fail to see just what we are called to do," were other comments.

Two weeks later Elder Widtsoe, attended a meeting of the joint boards at which the senior committee's report was presented. In the discussion which followed, the question was raised "as to whether the lesson work for this department should be more along religious lines and whether the department is meeting the purpose for which it was created." Other members pointed out that "MIA enrollment and attendance has been greatly increased since the establishment of the senior department, and that many people are becoming interested who have not heretofore responded to other courses of study."

But at the end of the meeting Elder Widtsoe "commented on the abundance of material contained in many of the manuals and said that much of it was beyond his comprehension. . . . He further stated that unless we flavor all we do and all we have with the message of the Prophet Joseph Smith, we are far afield, adding, 'If this organization intends to give extension courses like the University of Utah, we are missing our purpose.'"

At the next weekly board meeting, Superintendent Smith appointed a special survey committee to examine the goals of the MIA: "to study our assignment with a view of emphasizing the correlation of our departments and the unifying of our MIA work." Arthur L. Beeley, Axel A. Madsen, Ephraim E. Ericksen, George Q. Morris, George R. Hill, Oscar A. Kirkham, and Herbert B. Maw were the YMMIA representatives. John A. Widtsoe was appointed chairman. His diary indicates



*E.E. and Edna at
"The House of Ephraim",
their summer cabin, 1941*

that seven or eight committee meetings were held between November 24 and January 8.

Ericksen reports that he and one other (probably Oscar A. Kirkham) attended all the meetings, but "for reasons best known to themselves the [other YMMIA] representatives . . . did not attend the meetings regularly. Dr. Widtsoe worked hard to satisfy what he thought were the needs of the youth of Zion. He prepared the entire document, presenting it part by part at different meetings of the committee for their approval. . . . The sisters were equally faithful in their uplifted hands. The man who sat by my side said little or nothing that I recall. . . . I . . . did what I could to salvage some of the things that seemed most dear to me but received no support."

On 10 January 1934 Elder Widtsoe reported to the general boards on behalf of the special survey committee. He distributed copies of a document titled "General Plans and Policies for MIA Study Courses," noting that the outline was to guide the departments in manual preparation, "and added that the committees were to feel free in making whatever changes they felt necessary which would be to the best advantage of the work in their particular departments."

The general theme was "To Help Make Real Latter-day Saints." Each age group was given an aim or theme. Finally, it was recommended "that an editorial committee be appointed by the executives to edit all manuscripts for study courses, programs, and activity outlines with the assistance of the author as to content and form."

In the proposed editorial committee Ericksen undoubtedly saw the end of the independent departments, and—given the likelihood of Elder Widtsoe being appointed chairman of that committee—the end of the social orientation Ericksen and others had worked for. "The Church is run by inspiration, not by committee," he was reminded.

"I told them that I thought a report of this kind should be the result of the deliberation of the entire committee. It was not that. It was the work of Dr. Widtsoe and the committee serving merely as a rubber stamp. This was true but might as well have been left unsaid."

After a lengthy discussion the Widtsoe motion was approved. Ericksen was deeply disappointed in his colleagues who voted for the report publicly but privately sided with him. "In the meeting they were on the Lord's side; after the meeting they were on my side."

He left the room intending never to return. Distraught and depressed, he asked himself, "Why should I continue to serve in an organization that does not really want what I have to give? Were my friends really sincere when they praised and published everything that I had written? Does an authoritative Church really believe in the cooperative effort of its members?"

Two or three weeks later, he returned. Arthur L. Beeley succeeded in having a joint committee appointed to study the attitudes of youth toward religion. If the Widtsoe committee could not be diverted from its "gospel" oriented crusade—the survey committee continued to meet, hammering out a lengthy report—perhaps another special committee might be able to influence the board through the findings of such an investigation.

"The new conditions of social and economic life tend to render old standards obsolete."—MIA manual, 1932.

On February 7, chairman George Harris reported, "It is generally conceded that there is a strong tendency for our young people, many of them, to take an attitude against our orthodox beliefs." He cited a prayer published in the Delta Phi [an LDS fraternity] Bulletin as background on the religious attitudes of young people:

"Dear God, our Father, we remember before thee this Sabbath morning the great free souls who have been crowded from Thy Church—noble men and women whose spiritual freedom was greater to them than life. Bring them back, Father, into our communion again. Touch their hearts with understanding. Help them to forgive us. And we pray Thee, Father, touch also our hearts, for we have become hard and cold with our own self-righteousness. Our hearts are now filled with sorrow and remorse for our sins. We have crucified many and driven them out of Thy Church, thinking we did Thee service. And now before our eyes this morning this vast procession marches, made lonely through our exclusiveness, crushed by our ignorance. Help us to make our Church inclusive—not exclusive; creative—not preservative. Help us to be tolerant with intolerance. May Thy Church, through us, be a light unto the world, a light of freedom and peace, love and good will, where personal character and social justice may not die out."

Sister Helen S. Williams found that "youth is beginning to feel that information becomes obsolete unless it is replenished constantly with material to meet changing situations. . . . They have no desire to pull away, but they feel that the shoe that fit a generation ago refuses to go on the foot today. Human nature has not changed, but the conditions of life have, and the Church refuses to absorb new ideas."

Arthur L. Beeley discussed the critical attitudes of youth and then said: "I feel that they think we need a renaissance of leadership, a rebirth of leadership. They feel that we need to redefine our purposes in terms of this distressingly challenging world. They feel (and this is where I think their faith is sound) that there is in Mormonism the best principles of truth. . . . But we need to redefine those principles in the terms of 1934, not in terms of 1834."

He concluded with a plea to give youth the opportunity "to participate in the leadership of this Church. That participation has been denied them, in general. . . . And I am wondering if there isn't sanity in encouraging them in the hope that they might participate in plans which will affect the future—the future in which they will have to live."

Two weeks later, five returned missionaries from the University of Utah were invited to candidly discuss their attitudes with the Board. Generally, their remarks reflected the approach of Ericksen, Beeley, and other



Ephraim and Leif

progressives. The effect was to hopelessly split an already divided bard.

Nicholas G. Smith feared a widespread apostasy from the Church.

John F. Bowman declared that one reason many youths were losing their testimonies was "that we have preachers in the Church and leaders in the Church, sometimes in high places, who don't believe those Gospel things, and the young people have great respect for these leaders. . . . For that reason, I think possible it might be a good idea if the Church had some sort of censorship on preachers and the type of preaching we have. . . . We preach too much philosophy and too little spirituality."

On the other hand, countered Ericksen, "If I am eternally challenged, 'Do you believe this—a, b, c, d,' if I am constantly put on the spot, well I begin to quiver. In other words, anything begins to shake when you are constantly asked to analyze it. But if we wholeheartedly plunge in and say, 'Let us build up the finest community the world has ever seen,' they will not ask whether our leaders are inspired men."

That ideal community would be characterized by excellence of social justice, economic justice, intellectual integrity, and appreciation of the arts. To achieve that ideal in the modern world required "careful consideration of our situation," constant reinterpretation of religious teachings in light of new scientific discoveries, and "scholars who have faith in Mormonism." He concluded:

"I would like to see the young men remain loyal to this Church. I would like to see my own boys remain loyal. But I am confident that if they remain loyal, it will be because we face them honestly and frankly with their difficulties and permit them to investigate and go as far as they want. God is on the side of truth and we should have enough faith in our Church, enough faith in our cumulative theology, to permit any sort of investigation."

Other board members commented that there was an apostasy occurring among the youth of the Church due to secularization and/or ineffective Church methods in counteracting the trend. Though they disagreed as to the extent, the causes, and the remedies, it appeared that most agreed on one thing. Something needed to be done. And it seemed that another survey committee would be appointed to investigate the situation until Elder Widtsoe observed that the Twelve had already begun a Churchwide survey. "The survey now under way is the property of the Council of the Twelve. It is just beginning. . . . Certainly it would be unwise for two branches of the Church to go ahead along the same road, not knowing what the other is doing." The proposal for a Churchwide survey conducted by the MIA was tabled—and with it, any hopes the modernists might have held for demonstrating what they considered to be the needs of the present generation.

On 14 March 1934, Elder Widtsoe presented the twenty-eight page report of his committee, consisting of nearly two hundred points covering purposes, divisions of activities, organization, courses of study, and recommendations. It was signed by all eight YLMIA representatives, but by only half of the men. Axel A. Madsen, Arthur L. Beeley, E. E. Ericksen, and Herbert B. Maw did not sign.

Introducing the report, Elder Widtsoe commented, "We regret that several of the committee members were unable to attend the meetings, for it placed a heavier burden on those who took part in the proceedings." It is not known if Ericksen attended this committee's meetings from January 10 to March 14—presumably not.

The report requested definition and clarification of the MIA assignment from the general authorities and recommended a general correlation committee of auxiliary executives to "clarify the fields of the respective auxiliary organizations." It called for standing MIA committees to edit publications, survey and evaluate programs and guide leisure-time activities.

The Purpose of the MIA was defined under ten articles, including:

"The dominating purpose of the MIA is to establish in the hearts of the members 'an individual testimony of the truth and magnitude' of the Gospel as restored by the Prophet Joseph Smith. This is to be accomplished by teaching the 'eternal principles of the great science of

life,' the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; by teaching all other commendable things; by the development of the personal gifts of MIA members; and by showing how personal gifts may be used in applying the eternal principles of truth to daily life.

"Another purpose of the MIA . . . is to help the members win happiness in life by teaching them the importance of choosing correct life activities, and of carrying them out in the proper spirit and manner."

Study courses were to "be built around a Gospel framework. A text, such as might be used in schools or other secular institutions, would be unacceptable for MIA purposes because of the absence of Gospel correlation."

Following the Widtsoe presentation, "E. E. Ericksen informed the Board that he thought our MIA objectives were not clearly enough stated, and also submitted a paper which he had prepared which in his opinion should be set up as objectives of the MIA." Ericksen would not yield. Dr. Beeley also submitted a brief minority statement.

Ericksen warned against confusing recreation and testimony-building. "To attempt to create an 'individual testimony of the truth and magnitude' of Mormonism out of a basketball game . . . it seems to me is entirely futile and moreover may defeat the very purposes which they now serve."

He objected to a testimony cult. "An individual testimony and insight into the magnitude of Mormonism are themselves instrumental to higher and more ultimate values. Namely, the development of personality, the love of truth, of beauty and of righteousness. Unless a testimony is viewed in this light, it may actually stand in the way of further spiritual progress. With many good folk, the search for the good life ends with a testimony."

Finally he disputed the "search for happiness." "Nor do I believe the MIA is carried on for the purpose of enabling its members to 'win happiness'. [Happiness] is a feeling that accompanies activity rather than an end which we seek or ought to seek. . . . The MIA is more concerned with the kind of life that gives happiness than with happiness as an end in itself."

Ericksen offered three substitute goals: The love of truth, "cultivated through frank and free discussion of any matter in the field of science, religion, history, or philosophy"; love of beauty, through "a rich and varied program in literature, music, art, dramatics, esthetic dancing, and the study of the beauties of nature"; and the love of virtue and the development of goodness, through "many cooperative enterprises in which youth actively participate."

These were the three values Ericksen felt to be, in the highest sense, spiritual and eternal. They also provided "a common basis for cooperation" with virtue-loving non-Mormons. "We may accomplish more if we magnify common spiritual objectives than if we exaggerate differences."

While few board members would have taken Ericksen's ecumenism seriously, several undoubtedly viewed his naturalistic philosophy of religion as a significant symptom, if not a cause, of what ailed the Church. The Ericksen-Beeley reports flew in the face of the emerging orthodoxy. Their courage/tenacity/

"Any individual who does not accept the fulness of these doctrines . . . is not a Latter-day Saint."

stubbornness/rebelliousness made continued service on the board unlikely and they knew it.

Shortly before his death in September 1934, Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency went to dinner at the home of his son-in-law, Gordon Hyde. The Ericksens and another couple were also invited. Near the end of the meal President Ivins told the group that Elder Widtsoe, who was writing a biography of President Grant, had been keeping the President informed as to the MIA situation, and that "At a meeting in which President Grant, his two Counselors, President A. W. Ivins and J. Reuben Clark, and the Superintendency of the YMMIA, George Albert Smith, Richard R. Lyman and Melvin J. Ballard, were present, President Grant expressed indignation at the Superintendency for not getting rid of three board members, Ericksen, _ and _ . In response, President Ivins said, 'Heber, Heber, Heber, I object to any man being tried without their presence to hear the charge!'"

Afterwards, President Ivins walked the Ericksens out to their car, and, according to Edna Ericksen, "he held my husband's arm, and looked him square, and said, 'Brother Ericksen, you're a great man. You will make a contribution wherever you go. I want you to know I ask for no higher or better place in the hereafter than the place where you go.'" The tribute must have been a great boost to a man who was passing through one of the most excruciating trials of his life.

A few months later—23 January 1935—David O. McKay, who had replaced Anthony W. Ivins in the First Presidency, announced the decision to release the YMMIA superintendency, due to their workload as general authorities, and with them the entire board. When the board was reorganized in April, fourteen of the thirty-seven were retained. To no one's surprise, Ericksen was not among them.

Fortunately the release came at a time when good feelings had been restored among the board members. In November Ericksen publicly apologized to the board for his January remarks. "Superintendent Smith, in behalf of the boards, expressed appreciation to Brother Ericksen for his fine attitude, and stated that the incident was now considered past history and that any ill feelings shown were now moved aside. Brother Smith added that Brother Ericksen had done more than he could have expected of anyone, and that he was deeply grateful for his fine attitude."

Faithful Unorthodoxy

Ericksen believed the release was probably necessary and, in the end, a good move. Nevertheless, it was a heavy blow. After thirteen years of dedicated service, the Church seemed to have no further use for his energies, and he turned to his book *Social Ethics* (1937).

In 1938, after a hiatus of three years, Ericksen was called to teach the high priests group in his ward, which

"Mormonism needs the loyal devotion of all men and women of education as it has never done before. Do not forsake the cause."

he greatly enjoyed. But when, in October 1939, a newly called group leader requested E. E. Ericksen to be his first counselor, the question of Ericksen's orthodoxy was raised. The stake presidency interviewed Ericksen to ascertain his belief on the fundamental principles of the Church. On November 3, the presidency reported that Ericksen was not orthodox, and he was not appointed. In fact, he was immediately released as teacher of the group.

In order to understand the climate in which Ericksen was declared "unorthodox," we refer to an address delivered by President J. Reuben Clark on 8 August 1938 at the summer convocation of seminary, institute and Church school teachers. The rooting out of worldly and unspiritual influences which had taken place in the MIA in 1935 continued now in the Church educational system with this hard-hitting speech. President Clark declared the "positive facts" which "must all be honestly believed, in full faith, by every member of the Church," i.e., the virgin birth of Jesus and his literal physical resurrection; "that the Father and the Son actually and in truth and very deed appeared to the Prophet Joseph"; and "that the Prophet's successors, likewise called of God, have received revelations. . . ."

Furthermore, these facts "and each of them, together with all things necessarily implied therein or flowing therefrom, must stand, unchanged, unmodified, without dilution, excuse, apology, or avoidance; they may not be explained away or submerged." And "Any individual who does not accept the fulness of these doctrines . . . is not a Latter-day Saint."⁶

When asked his beliefs concerning these points, Ericksen was unable to answer in the prescribed manner. To his stake presidency's question, "Do you accept Jesus as literally the Son of God, and the Savior of the world?" Ericksen replied, "I believe Jesus is the truest revelation of God to man. And as a great spiritual leader, He has set the ideal for humanity, and in this sense He has become the savior of mankind." As to the miraculous conception, crucifixion and physical resurrection, "I confess I am not inclined to accept this without question. These accounts of Jesus originated in an unscientific age and were transmitted in tradition and recorded by those who placed no check on their imagination. I therefore regard them to be hardly reliable as the foundation of religious faith."

Similarly, "I believe that if there ever were a prophet, Joseph Smith was a prophet in the sense of one who initiated a great spiritual program and inspires worthy ideals. In this sense Joseph Smith was not only a prophet, but a great prophet." But as to the critical question of the facticity of the first and subsequent visions, Ericksen was not sure.

Ericksen was a heretic. President Clark had said, "For any Latter-day Saint . . . to explain away, or misinterpret, or evade or elude, or most of all, to repudiate or deny the great fundamental doctrines of the Church is to give the lie to his intellect, to lose his self-respect, to bring sorrow to his friends, to . . . bring shame to his parents, to besmirch the Church and its members, and to forfeit the respect and honor of those whom he has sought, by his course, to win as friends and helpers."

In the fall of 1938 all such persons were asked to resign from the Church educational system. In January 1939, E. E. Ericksen was released from teaching the high priests.

Yet he continued to consider himself a "real" Mormon: "I hope and pray earnestly that my sons and daughter will not permit this experience of their father to interfere in any way with their loyalty and devotion to the finer ideals which Mormonism stands for. I pray also that in the near future, the leadership of Mormonism will recognize the need for greater tolerance and will include within its system all the finer things that higher education stands for. For surely, true spirituality must be open minded, tolerant and critical, seeking truth from all sources. Mormonism needs the loyal devotion of all men and women of education as it has never done before. Do not forsake the cause."

At stake conferences, old friends among the general authorities continued to invite the Ericksens to sit on the stand, and President George Albert Smith continued to visit the professor on personal matters. But it was primarily Ericksen's own buoyant spirit that sustained him. To Alma he wrote:

"My Church duties are few but important. I go to the high priest meetings about once a month and with proper humiliation and faith give the brethren a bit of true Christian philosophy. In the same spirit they listen attentively, yet prefer 'to remain on the Lord's side.' [My block teacher] visits me at least once a month, and in the kindest spirit of the gospel provides me with insight into the deepest theology of Mormonism. To all of this I listen and return to him measure for measure my own FOOLosophy."

His irrepressible sense of humor stood him in good stead through the years of official indifference. When his brother Alma was called to a bishopric, Ephraim wrote:

"I am also pleased to be reassured that your ecclesiastical brethren of Berkeley still look upon you as a man of faith and in whom they may [trust] the youth of Zion. And that reminds me, before I got my Great Dane I too enjoyed their confidence. But there it ended. They thought, I suppose, that a man who could be led about by a dog was not a reliable spiritual leader. That insult to my faithful companion left in me a wound that never did heal. I feel more secure in the presence of that breed of dogs than I do in some birds perched in high places."

However much confidence E.E.'s great dane may have reciprocated, other watchdogs were not so trusting. Since publication of his *Social Ethics* in 1937, Ericksen had used it as a text for his classes at the university. In his 1938 statement President Clark attacked ethics as a gospel counterfeit: "To make of the Gospel a mere system of ethics is to confess a lack of faith, if not a disbelief, in the hereafter. [Furthermore,]

⁶"Church News," *Deseret News*, 13 August 1938, p. 1.

one living, burning, honest testimony of a righteous God-fearing man that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God's prophet, is worth a thousand books and lectures aimed at debasing the Gospel to a system of ethics or seeking to rationalize infinity."

And in his 1941 baccalaureate address at the University of Utah, Elder John A. Widtsoe carried the battle against ethics to the doors of public education as well: "The covetous man may insist that he does not steal or lie, that he is neither immoral nor murderous. But, a little inspection will reveal that he does not lie or steal because he might be caught and sent to jail; that he is moral because immorality might fasten an unspeakable disease upon him; that he commits no murder because thereby he might lose his own life. He is an ethical man. That is, his code of life is chiefly for self-protection. Ethics exists for selfish good. It provides for a smoother and safer life in society; but it does not take God into account. . . . Ethics and religion are poles apart."

While there is no direct evidence that either Clark or Widtsoe had singled Ericksen out, there are some passages from *Social Ethics* they would have found offensive: "It is admitted that above and beyond these [natural] forces there may be spiritual powers which man does not comprehend and over which he has no control. But surely, from the standpoint of progress toward a larger and more final adjustment of man to his social and physical environment, surrender to a feeling of dependence upon an unknown power can only result in moral chaos and spiritual bewilderment. . . . The greatest foes of spirituality are indeed such obnoxious things as bigotry, autocracy, dogma, superstition, and prejudice—all of which, curiously enough, may parade in the cloak of religion."

On the other hand, "To ignore religion is to neglect perhaps the most important single element of the ethical life. . . . The moral life as a creative process expresses itself in its highest and truest form when its ideals are religiously inspired, when its values are motivated by the religious impulse. . . . Deprived of its [religious] support, morality lacks emotional enthusiasm, wholeheartedness, and true devotion. It tends to become individualistic and temporary, enduring social loyalties yielding to mere expediency."

Prophets and Priests

In "Priesthood and Philosophy," delivered to the Utah Academy of Arts, Science and Letters in 1957, Ericksen distinguished between prophet and priest. The priest is concerned with ritual and belief, unity and conformity. For authority he turns to sacred scripture and the past, and is generally intolerant of any new ideas in philosophy or science. Prophets, on the other hand, are concerned with moral living, personal initiative and social reconstruction. They look to the present and the future, and the effects of actions in determining their moral values. "For the one the Lord has spoken, for the other the Lord is speaking."

Joseph Smith was both prophet and high priest, as Ezekiel. Ideally, Ericksen thought, the two should work together. "The Mormon community has accepted and elaborated the priestly institutions and traditions but appears to have neglected the critical and creative contributions of the higher prophets." Though he acknowledged that "the priestly culture has served as a stabilizing factor, conserving values and maintaining a unity of purpose in community life," Ericksen's sympathies

"To ignore religion is to neglect perhaps the most important single element of the ethical life . . ."

were clearly with the prophetic. "The Mormon community has priests by the hundreds of thousands, but few prophets; and with few exceptions, their prophets have been more priestly in their philosophy than prophetic."

Yet Ericksen remained optimistic. In January 1959 he was invited to respond to a paper by Dr. R. Kent Fielding, assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University. In his paper, "The Concept of Stages in Mormon Historical Development," Dr. Fielding maintained that "Mormonism made the decision for conservatism against democratic ideas and organizational forms in 1837." There had been episodic recurrences of liberalism, but through general authority addresses and employment standards "the Church has its liberals well in hand." For Fielding "the pattern of the future seems clear."

Not so clear for Ericksen. He refused to leave the field to the priests. "The Priest and the Prophet will always be with us, I predict; the one to advance the Promising New and the other to defend the Hallowed Old." He pointed to the increased level of education in the Church and the critical thinking espoused by the young. "Creative thought in Mormonism is not going to be depressed," he concluded.

Belief in an emerging class of scholars, able and willing to use the critical method within their heritage, gave Ericksen the hope to begin a new book, "Mormonism in Philosophic Perspective," in 1956. Extensive notes still exist for most chapters, but the manuscript was never finished. There came a point, probably in 1962, when he threw down his pencil and told Edna he was finished. "I've already said too much. It doesn't do any good to go on with it anymore." On 23 December 1967, at the age of eighty-one, the crusading philosopher passed on his cause to a younger generation.

In a one-page statement on "The Prophetic Philosophers" Ericksen described the role he had hoped to fill in Mormonism:

"But there are philosophers who believe it their obligation not only to examine religious beliefs, moral standards, and social institutions but also to evaluate them in the light of present conditions and point out the direction of religious thought and social possibilities. . . . Although the philosophers do not 'preach,' and make no pretensions of authority . . . they do teach the youth of the Church the principles of scientific methods, principles of ethics, logic, metaphysics. They do not, to be sure, treat directly Church doctrine, but by implication their methods and scientific ideas and philosophical principles effect the basic assumptions of Mormon orthodoxy.

"They may not claim supernatural insight or power," he said. "They may even hesitate to say that they speak for God, but in their own heart of hearts they believe they do."