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Dawn Comfort
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Dear Sister Comfort,

Your patience is much appreciated in waiting for me to give more than surface answers. My flood of deadlines is over, and I'm in control once more--I'm very sorry to have kept you waiting on details. My note says you called at the end of last November, but I'm really answering the questions you asked last September 5. I realize your own reading puts you ahead considerably, but these were your concerns then, which I'm addressing.

I've had time in this past week to review my own files, and if you have additional questions, I will give you prompt and honest answers, as far as we have data. This is actually 50% of the problem, since everyone who writes honestly has to remark on how little is known behind the scenes. Sealing dates are known, and in many cases some comments of Joseph Smith wives on how they took this step, and their feelings then and afterward. Quite a bit is known about Emma, but even then there are big blanks in the record, as far as a consecutive story. As I review your questions, so much turns on the meanings an author reads into the documents--and the premises a writer begins with.

One of your questions is about the background of the authors of the *Mormon Enigma* (abbreviated to "ME" in this letter, quoting the page of the first edition, with notation if the position taken is different in the second edition). My understanding is that Linda Newell is active, and I assume that she is somewhat near the liberal Mormon position of her husband. When the Hofmann forgeries threw doubt on the Moroni story, Val Avery was quoted in the newspapers as saying Mormon missionaries could no longer use that. By hearsay only, I understand Val is not now a church member. In the preface to their second edition, they state they do not intend to comment much on Joseph Smith, and on p. xvi of the second edition, they downgrade the revelatory force of D&C 132 by using a Joseph F. Smith quotation, saying that the revelation would have been written differently if not given in the midst of conflict. However, they are misrepresenting him, since he definitely did not mean the doctrine would have been different if given under different circumstances. I mention this to show they have taken a clear position of skepticism on this revelation through the Prophet.

My own position is that of a believer in the Prophet's mission and his revelations. I am sure in mind and soul that he told the truth about the First Vision and the coming of Moroni. Therefore I find no reason to doubt his revelation on the plurality of worlds and how they are populated. Plural marriage is part of this overall doctrine. There is a breathtaking beauty in the concepts of

*Yours at
love,
Richard*

eternal growth and truly celestial relationships. Joseph Smith said the same thing about his vision of the three degrees of glory, and I deeply agree. Yet strangely, D&C 76 tried the faith of many early Saints who saw God's justice as eroded by allowing rewards in some measure for all. Brigham Young was one of these, and he said he put the doctrine on the shelf until he could understand it better, which he came to do. Lincoln spoke of the Bible to a friend who visited him in the White House: "Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man." I think we can do this with the revelations of the Prophet, including D&C 132.

Judging God's ethics is not a human area of expertise. The scriptures contain apparent contradictions in conduct that I'm sure will be better understood in the future. Indeed, the premise of the restored gospel is that we are here to learn to use faith, sometimes against rational odds. Analogies help me greatly. Parents tell full truths to their children in a step by step process and over a long period of time. God may give a revelation and not allow its knowledge to go out all at once, as in the case of the transfiguration experience of the key apostles (Matt. 17:9). The concept of national security is a valid one, where diplomatic or military tactics are not disclosed in the interest of preserving the safety of citizens. This comes close to the Nauvoo situation, as we discussed on the phone, where hostility and prejudice were so prevalent in the region that responsible Mormons feared the very breakdown in public order that took place after the martyrdom. Joseph Smith went to Carthage to stave off armed and enforced demands that his people leave the state. Even as he taught polygamy and the temple ceremonies to trusted leaders, he was acutely aware that he was risking his life and the safety of church members in a society that had made bigamy a punishable crime. He was forced to limit knowledge of the practice in order to avoid legal prosecution by his enemies. When he said an angel commanded him not to delay further, that makes sense because he had but a few years left to teach concepts of marriage and the temple. His integrity is shown by active plans, documented in journals of associates, to leave Illinois and settle in the west where Mormon beliefs could be practiced without violating state laws.

I postponed writing you mainly because I did not have the time to go back to individual folders and check out generalizations on the Prophet's plural wives. However, I've had time to review my conclusions and be confident of overall patterns, which I'll state first before going to your specific questions. By now you know Bachman as well as I do, so I can refer to his approaches without documentation. Now there is book by Todd Compton, which I have very mixed feelings about. He writes a preface that communicates two things--skepticism of the plural marriage revelation and admission of the limited knowledge we have on the relationships of the Prophet with his sealed wives. This is followed by detailed biographical chapters on each of the wives, detailed enough to include unreliable as well as reliable evidence. His interpretations suggest sexual contact in excess of the evidence, and he pursues a Victorian theme of the victimized woman--hence the editorialized title, *In Sacred Loneliness*. My files on each woman are very detailed, so I respect the effort it took to compile the biographies, but some of his judgments I do not respect. Furthermore, Bachman's work was very important, and Compton virtually ignores it. So I do not recommend this new work for its interpretations.