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Understanding the Year 1820

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UNDERSTANDING THE YEAR 1820

Craig L. Foster

Book Note: Richard E. Bennett, *1820: Dawning of the Restoration* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University / Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020). 380 pages. Hardcover, \$31.99.

***Abstract:** Richard E. Bennett's 1820: Dawning of the Restoration takes a look at this significant year in a global historical context. He has produced a fascinating book for both members of the Church and non-members.*

Richard E. Bennett explained about his approach to the year 1820 and Joseph Smith's vision, "One major purpose of this work is to expand the stage of that visionary experience from merely a local Palmyra setting to a more global environment" (vii). What happened in that grove of trees in upstate New York "cannot be understood or explained in isolation from those nearby years before and after it" (viii).

Like his previous works, this book is well researched, sourced, and written. It offers interesting insights and page-turning narrative. Among the characters whose stories grace the pages of 1820 are Napoléon Bonaparte, Jean-François Champollion, Ludwig van Beethoven, William Wilberforce, Simón Bolívar, Henry Clay, and Alexander Von Humboldt. Bennett carefully selected these individuals because of their "stellar, unforgettable contributions to their fields of activity" (x). He further explained, "Some made discoveries and contributions so pertinent to the rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that they begged inclusion in this work" (x).

Bennett's approach of focusing on one year and what happened in and around that year not only at the place of particular interest but around the world is not new but nor is it common. In 2017, I reviewed a

book by noted Irish historian Turtle Bunbury.¹ I noted with fascination how diverse events and people's lives can be contemporaneous and sometimes even intersect.

Bennett's 1820 embraces this format of taking one year or event and discovering what was happening all around it. With this approach, the possibilities are fascinatingly endless in terms of works for future historians. But, in the meantime, readers can enjoy *1820: Dawning of the Restoration*, which is well worth their time and effort.

Craig L. Foster earned an MA and an MLIS at Brigham Young University. He is also an accredited genealogist and works as a research specialist at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. He has published articles about different aspects of Latter-day Saint history. He is the author of two books, co-author of two books, and co-editor of a three-volume series discussing the history and theology of plural marriage. Foster is also on the editorial board of the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal.

1. Craig L. Foster, "An Important Year in History," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 27 (2017), 221–22, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-important-year-in-history/>.