George Fox and Narratives of Peace & Activism In The Quaker Tapestry

From their 17th century inception as radical “Publishers of Truth” Quakers sought to proclaim their non-propositional faith through apologetic witness and prophetic social concern. Quaker story spoke of an inwardly empowering “Light” of Christian experience that actively impacted one’s outward commitment for personal and social change. Quaker values and ethical imperatives came to influence the larger world community far beyond the sect’s limited numbers. Many foundational Quaker works are centrally narrative in character, none more so than the Journal of founder George Fox.

An important contribution to the on-going narrative transmission of Quaker values is the late 20th. Century project of 77 Quaker Tapestry panels modeled on the crewel work story-telling tradition of the 11th Century Bayeux Tapestry. These uniquely combined visual-textual panels rhetorically and aesthetically reprise aspects of historical Quaker distinctives: particularly the Quaker witness to peace, central to over three centuries of Quaker activism. The Quaker Tapestry continues a long narrative tradition employing individual and community stories yielding normative, interpretive keys regarding a distinctive faith tradition’s engagement with “enacted Truth.” The five George Fox panels directly present pivotal episodes reflecting spiritual and physical struggles endured by George Fox that posit and inform fundamental Quaker moral-ethical praxis.

My presentation will apply a growing recognition of the centrality of narrative strategy to truth claims and the way in which storiied theme, motif, and personal episode offer values interpretations within faith communities. How these core interlocking concepts are developed in Fox’s Journal and echoed in the Quaker Tapestry’s visual text constitutes those principles of moral-spiritual framework empowering Friends doctrinal belief in ongoing peace and social activism.

My paper and slides of the panels will examine the thematic interplay between Quaker-informed ideology and the values envisioning in the Quaker Tapestry’s five core George Fox panels. Correlating key autobiographical episodes from Fox’s Journal with the selected visual representations from the Quaker Tapestry I will explore the narrative structure of these two distinctively differing "texts," one encribed and from the late 17th Century, the other visually stitched and from the late 20th.