

A REVIEW
by
Thomas F. McDaniel¹
of
JOHN L. TOPOLEWSKI'S
THE RABBI'S ELIXIR: EPISTEMOLOGY
AND STORY TELLING²

Topolewski addresses himself to the issue of our contemporary distrust for the genre of “story” (both storytelling and “storybecoming”) because of our passion for factual verifiable truth. This distrust for the story he views with regret, noting the richness of the biblical stories, the profound parables of Jesus, and the excellent rabbinic didactic models.

The author notes that since the professional identity of the clergy carries symbolic meaning, this process of symbolization is well communicated by storytelling and storybecoming. Topolewski is indebted to Kantian criticism and epistemology for his views on storytelling, which he summarizes in a linguistic equation: ‘Expertence + Symbolization = Meaning. He prefers *Geschichte* (story) to *Historie* (fact) since the former comes from the heart, whereas the latter comes from the head. This idea was already latent in a statement he quotes from Phillips Brooks, “Preaching . . . has two essential elements, truth and personality.” In Topolewski’s own words. “Real transformation, re-symbolization, comes then when the biblical stories we encounter become our stories, *Geschichte*, appropriated in a uniquely personal way.”

¹ This review was published in 1980 in *Homiletic*, Volume 5: 1 (1980), pp. 9–10.

² His article was published in the journal *Nexus* 56, Volume 12: 1 (1978).

Topolewski employs several brief stories to illustrate his essay.