

# Jasper



ANTHONY ESOLEN

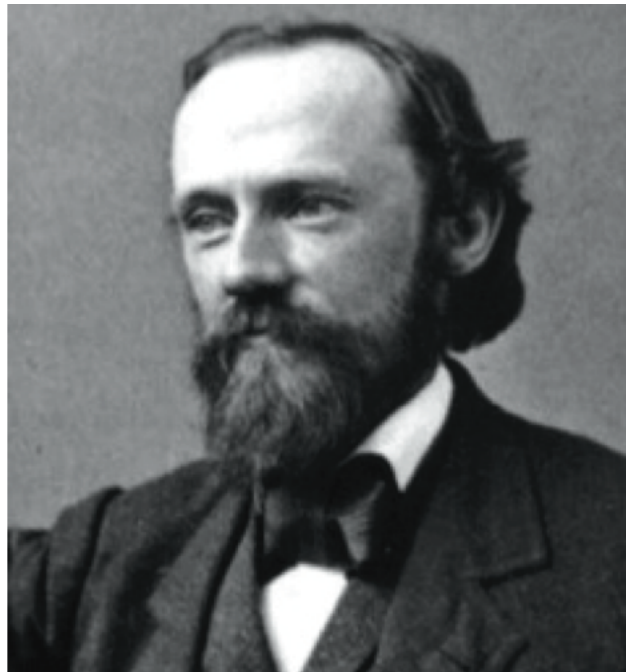
MAGDALEN COLLEGE  
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## Man of the day:

### Horatio Storer, M.D.

One of the finest men I've learned about in recent years was a Quaker who became a Roman Catholic, but who changed the world before he converted. His name was Horatio Storer, and if you are an American citizen reading this, and your family was on this soil by the middle of the nineteenth century, you may be alive today because of him.

I said he grew up as a Quaker, and he was a deeply pious one at that, but all boy, all the time. When he was eight years old his mother and father sent him off to a boarding school for boys, on Cape Cod. So he wrote letters home, asking for treats, thanking his uncle for a hunting rifle, telling stories about school and everything. One day the teacher was sick, so the boys had the day off after they finished their chores. They decided they would build a log cabin, and that meant cutting down the trees, making the trunks into logs, fitting them together, and even flying a flag from the top of it when they were done. The boys would go out combing the beaches, or they'd take a boat for fishing, or they'd tramp through the woods looking for berries and nuts and wild fruit.



One time they hiked ten miles to Barnstable with the other boys to live it up in town, paying a visit to the mayor's house, stopping at all the shops, eating a big hearty dinner, and getting written up in the local newspaper.

Horatio was a restless outdoorsman. Did a man five miles down the shore find a shark skeleton? Horatio had to find that man. Was there a place on a fishing boat for a teenage boy to sail to Cape Breton and Labrador – which is often so cold that even the polar bears build fires? Horatio had to be on that boat. You could guess that Horatio would be interested in the science of life, so when he went to Harvard he told his mother and father that he was going to become a doctor.

Back then, scientists had microscopes that were strong enough for them to see an amoeba or a skin cell, so they did know that when the sperm of a man unites with the egg cell of a woman, something miraculous happens. But was that when life really began?

The old idea was that it began at “quickening.” Let me explain what that means. When the baby gives his first kick – because his knees are all cramped up, or he hears a band playing Yankee Doodle Dandy from a few yards outside of his fleshly wall – that was called

“quicken,” not because people thought that what once was not human was suddenly human. Think of an acorn lying on the sidewalk. Nothing is happening to it. Think of the water from a muddy river washing up at its banks. First there’s a little mud, then there’s a lot of mud, but otherwise nothing is happening to the mud. That was what they used to think of the very young human being in the womb. It was like mud collecting at the bank of the river. Then all it once you’d feel the kick, and that meant that it had come into action. It was now “quick,” which was just the old word for “alive.” It was as if you shot the lump of mud with a bolt of lightning, and all at once it changed, and you ended up with a very little Swamp Creature or something.

That old idea was wrong.

Horatio Storer saw that it was wrong. He looked, and he saw, and he thought. The fertilized egg was already a complete living thing, though still very small.

It wasn’t just lying there like an acorn that hasn’t sprouted. It wasn’t a collection of mud. It grew just as other living things grew. It took in food, and it got rid of what it did not need. It wasn’t a *part* of the mother. Your finger is a part of you, because it makes no sense otherwise. You don’t ever see a finger all by itself, hopping down the street. If you held a baby chick in the palm of your hand and fed it sugar water from an eyedropper, that baby chick wouldn’t be a “part” of you just because you closed it in your hand, or because you fed it. It would be what it is, a baby chick. It doesn’t matter if the chick is in your hands or not. It’s a chick.

Dr. Storer also saw that the very tiny human

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being was a separate person from the mother. That didn’t mean that it did not *need* the mother. A newborn baby needs its mother, and nobody doubts that a newborn baby is human and alive. Dr. Storer knew that the fertilized egg would travel its way through the Fallopian tube down to the womb, and while it was doing that *it was not even attached* to the mother. It was itself, like the chick in your hand. Then it would implant itself on the wall of the womb, where it would grow and grow. It was alive before, and moving on its own, and so it was alive now, growing. That is just a plain scientific fact.

Dr. Storer knew what that meant. The

fertilized egg is a human being at an early stage of development. That’s not really different from what we are. We’re all at stages of development or decay. An old man isn’t less human just because he walks with a cane. A baby isn’t less human just because he can’t walk at all, and wants to chew the top of Grandpa’s cane, or the top of Grandpa. A smart man isn’t more human than

a dull man, just because the smart man can multiply 854 by 329 in his head, and the dull man has to take off his shoes to count to twenty. The smart man is a man, and the dull man is a man – not a dog or a cat. So when you kill a human being, you are committing a murder. That’s what Dr. Storer knew. It was as clear as day.

Other doctors heard what Storer was saying, and they came to the same conclusion too. Dr. Storer led the American Medical Association to reform the laws, making it illegal to kill that tiny brother or sister of ours, who needs us and has done nothing wrong. Doctors back then were about healing, not killing, not even if you thought you had an excuse for killing. There

weren't any excuses. A life is a life.

So you might be alive now because of it. Many a woman in a tough situation might have found some wretched doctor to help her get rid of her child. But after they changed the law, and changed the minds and hearts of people too, that same woman would have given birth to the child. Maybe then she took care of it herself. Maybe she gave it up for adoption. The point was that the child lived, and the mother would never have to think, for the rest of her life, that she had crushed a baby inside her. Her body would have gotten heavy for a time, till the baby was born. But her soul would have been lighter.

At the age of thirty nine, Dr. Storer was warmly welcomed into the Catholic Church. He and his wife and children settled in Newport, Rhode Island, by the sea, where he was a beloved citizen and doctor for many years, and a promoter of the Church and her schools. He was a close friend of a great builder of schools and parishes, Bishop Hendricken of Providence.

We could use a million like him now. We could use ten or twenty – or one. We'll always need honest men and women who love the smallest of the human family.



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**Anthony Esolen** is a lecturer, translator, and writer. Among his books are *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture*, and *Nostalgia: Going Home in a Homeless World*, and most recently *The Hundredfold: Songs for the Lord*. He is a professor and writer in residence at Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts, in Warner, New Hampshire.

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