

DO YOU LOVE YOUR CHILD BECAUSE YOU HAVE WASHED IT?

Hosea Ballou was an “Ultra-Universalist” who believed that sin is always punished in this world, not in the next. To this was opposed not only the prevailing Universalist sentiment that corrective punishment after death would lead to purification and the ultimate restoration of all souls to God, but also the prevailing Unitarian sentiment that through free will, human beings could choose a good or evil path, and that salvation would come through the building of character. Even the great William Ellery Channing declared that he had never heard of a “more irrational doctrine” than Ultra-Universalism.

Ballou remained undaunted. In 1833, he answered Channing’s objection in detail, but received no reply. He wrote a major article in 1849, correcting the notion that he believed in “salvation irrespective of character,” that “as God will have all men to be saved, he will save them whether they will or not; whether they repent of their sins or not; – whether they reform or remain sinful.” Salvation is from sin, not from hell. “Was Saul fit to become a Christian? Is a sick person fit to be cured? Is a blind man fit to have his eyes opened? Are such as are dead in sin fit to be quickened into a life of holiness?”

In 1851, Ballou summarized the distinction he saw between his Ultra-Universalism and the “salvation by character” of Unitarianism with these words. “Your child has fallen into the mire, and its body and its garments are defiled. You cleanse it, and array it in clean robes. The query is, Do you love your child because you have washed it? or, Did you wash it because you loved it? How much more the divine Parent of us all!”

Ref: Ernest Cassara, *Hosea Ballou: The Challenge to Orthodoxy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 144-150.