

**Abiding Heresy, Abiding Grace
The Ministry of Hosea Ballou**

Note: This drama, compiled by the Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris, was presented in lieu of a sermon. ¹

NARRATOR

On June 7, 1852, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker took the pulpit to announce the passing of a great man, with these words:

PARKER

There died in this city recently a man who a little more than half a century ago, arose in our midst, a man not remarkable for extensive culture or acquirements, but certainly remarkable for great energy, who received the sentiment that God is the Father and Friend of the whole race of man, that it was the will of our heavenly Father that “not one of his little ones would perish.” I refer to Reverend Hosea Ballou. He went through the land proclaiming this great truth and he has wrought a revolution in the thoughts and minds of men more mighty than any which has been accomplished during the same time by all the politicians in the nation. ¹

(Enter YOUNG HOSEA and MATURIN. HOSEA holds book.)

NARRATOR

Scene I. A Young Heretic

YOUNG HOSEA

Father, you have taught me to read the Bible.

MATURIN BALLOU

That was my duty.

YOUNG HOSEA

To study it and to know it.

MATURIN BALLOU

Of course.

YOUNG HOSEA

Father, have you heard of Reverend Caleb Rich?

MATURIN BALLOU

Heard enough to know not to listen.

YOUNG HOSEA

But father, he says that all are to be saved after death, not just some.

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MATURIN BALLOU

All saved after death! What a ridiculous notion! And more than ridiculous—dangerous! Return to your chores. I'll not tolerate such ideas in my house.

YOUNG HOSEA

But Father, why won't you listen to me when this is of greatest importance. And I am not done with my reading!

MATURIN BALLOU

I said, return to your chores. What book is that?

YOUNG HOSEA

A Universalist book.

(EXIT HOSEA)

MATURIN BALLOU

(takes the book and looks at it)

“The Bible?”ⁱⁱ

(Exit MATURIN. Enter GOSSIPS ONE AND TWO)

GOSSIP ONE

So he told his father *he* wants to preach.

GOSSIP TWO

Oh I know! And even worse—he tried it. Turned so red he could hardly speak and his tongue too sticky to wag!

GOSSIP ONE

Perhaps it is not his tongue but his words that stick on his lips. Do you hear he talks of universal salvation! Blasphemy!!

(Exit GOSSIPS. Enter HUGH and EUNICE)

EUNICE

Excuse me, but you must have mistaken me for someone who gives a –

HUGH

Don't say it. After all, this *is* church.

EUNICE

I don't understand why this matters to us, to Unitarian Universalists. We stopped this silly squabbling about Christian doctrine generations ago. Why do I care about Hosea Ballou?

HUGH

I think he was brave. Challenging the religious establishment was risky business in those days—still is, if you think about it. And he had to take on his own father, after all.

EUNICE

And we all know how fun parental disapproval can be.

HUGH

Now that I think about it—saying that all people are good *was* pretty radical.

EUNICE

Still is. MY father still believes that some are *chosen* and others are *darned*. And guess what category *I* am in...

HUGH

Hey. Maybe you could really get to him if you start quoting the Bible at him like Hosea did to his dad. Picking out the Universalist stuff.

EUNICE

I think piercing my eyebrow would be easier.

(Exit HUGH and EUNICE. Enter YOUNG HOSEA, GOSSIP ONE)

YOUNG HOSEA

I have decided to be a preacher, though some hindrances stand in my way.

GOSSIP ONE

Such as?

YOUNG HOSEA

A seeming inability to preach.But I won't stop trying...(Clears throat and strikes a ministerial posture) Brethren...I....hum, let us see...yes...where are my notes?

GOSSIP ONE

You will not give up? Dangerous ideas and an unwilling tongue? Brother Ballou, I am not so sure of your call as you are.

YOUNG HOSEA

I *will* preach the truth about the saving love of God. It is a message of good news I must spread. It is a message the mind and heart can comprehend!

GOSSIP ONE

You know, without those notes, you aren't a half bad preacher..... Of course, as a theologian, you are damned.

(Exit GOSSIP ONE, enter MATURIN BALLOU)

YOUNG HOSEA

(to MATURIN BALLOU)

Father, I am studying Ethan Allen's work. He writes that we cannot leave our *minds* behind in matters of faith. And read what he writes here.

MATURIN BALLOU

(reading slowly)

No finite sin by finite man can equal infinite Sin.

YOUNG HOSEA

(excited)

Do you see? Isn't it amazing!

MATURIN BALLOU

It's heresy! I will read no more.

(Exit MATURIN and enter GOSSIPS)

GOSSIP TWO

Brother Ballou, why do you persist in such blasphemies?

GOSSIP ONE

Yes, answer our questions properly. We don't want to hear any more of your absurd, pernicious lies.

GOSSIP TWO

So. Here is a question: what would you do with a man who died reeking in sin and crime?

YOUNG HOSEA

(shrugs)

I think it would be a good idea to bury him.ⁱⁱⁱ

(Exit ALL, Enter HUGH and EUNICE)

EUNICE

You know, this junk about everybody going to heaven is *still* controversial. A couple years ago I read about a Pentecostal preacher who started reading the Bible just like Hosea and then he preached that all will be saved.

HUGH

So what? That's just common sense.

EUNICE

Well, it cost him his job and this was in 1999.

HUGH

Well, as a Unitarian Universalist in 2009, I don't care about salvation, universal or no.

EUNICE

You know...I *do* still struggle sometime to see the best—or even a tiny bit of good—in some people. People who've hurt me or people who've done something nasty to people I love....

HUGH

Well, my brother makes me believe the Calvinists were right—that some are just bad seeds.

EUNICE

And my English class *feels* like damnation.

HUGH

And when people won't even treat me like a human being just because my family looks different from theirs, well, I want to scorn them right back. Some people are just evil. Surely even Hosea himself would get that.

EUNICE

I don't know. ... If he were here, I think he'd be looking for something redeeming in everyone. Or at least something human. We don't have to like them—we just have to know they *could* change. We can't write them off.

HUGH

Okay, who died and made YOU Hosea Ballou?

(Exit ALL)

NARRATOR

Scene II: The Heretic's Heretic

John Murray had brought the ideas from England—ideas most there considered dangerous—that all men would be saved.....eventually—though certainly not before going through a rather trying period of torment. These ideas were developed by a man named James Relly and those who would mock them and try to make them things of mockery called them Rellyism. That was heresy enough, unfortunately, our religious ancestor did not stop there.

RESTORATIONIST

I believe that Brother Relly was right when he said that Christ was also guilty of Adam's sin and his punishment was the cross. What is your position, Father Ballou?

FATHER BALLOU

If this is the case, then, are not all men saved by Christ's death?

RESTORATIONIST

All men? Most certainly not.

FATHER BALLOU

Was such a punishment—such a huge and tragic death—to liberate only the elect?

RESTORATIONIST

You are leading us down an unsafe path and one a Christian should fear to tread.

(Exit RESTORATIONIST. Enter JUDITH MURRAY and CONGREGANT)

JUDITH MURRAY

Brother Ballou, I am Judith Murray, John Murray's wife. Reverend Murray asks me to extend his welcome to this, his accustomed pulpit. He is glad you will fill it as he is called away.

FATHER BALLOU

It is the greatest of honors to preach in the pulpit of Father Murray. I hope I will do credit...

CONGREGANT

Yes, we members look forward to hearing your message.

FATHER BALLOU

(Assumes preaching stance)

....So in conclusion....We have no more authority for carrying sin and its miseries into a future world than we have for carrying all other things into that state which we find in this.^{iv}

JUDITH MURRAY

Dear God! I must do something. I'm only grateful my dear husband is absent and so does not see this blasphemy in his precious pulpit....Oh, what can I do from the balcony! He is saying the sin dies with the man.

CONGREGANT

Or the woman!

JUDITH MURRAY

You must do something.

CONGREGANT

But ma'am. What can I do from the choir loft?

JUDITH MURRAY

Stand and tell them—something, anything. Undo what this upstart has done!

CONGREGANT

(clearing throat)

I wish to give notice that the doctrine which has been preached here this afternoon is not the doctrine which is usually preached in this house.

(Pause)

FATHER BALLOU

(calmly)

The audience will please take notice of what our brother has said^v. ... And now for the hymn....

(Exit JUDITH MURRAY. Enter EUNICE and HUGH.)

EUNICE

So you were pretty much hated by the mainstream Christians and the Universalists didn't like you either. Tough on the social life.

HUGH

What about the Unitarians?

FATHER BALLOU

I was a unitarian before any were called that. I couldn't reason out the trinity, that is like eternity times three.^{vi}....I fear though, that the Unitarians of my time also saw me as a

threat. I tried to respect those who came before me, but I simply *could not* relinquish my right to seek my own truths.

HUGH

Well, we still fight for that today....the right to chose our own path.

EUNICE

And we *still* argue about which path is *best* too.....

FATHER BALLOU

You see, eternity DOES exist.

(Exit ALL. Enter MURRAY and BALLOU)

FATHER BALLOU

Father Murray, let us look at Matthew 25:31!

FATHER MURRAY

Yes, yes, the parable of the sheep and the goats. What of it, Brother Ballou?

FATHER BALLOU

Am I right that the sheep represent those who believe in our Christ, the goats are the unbelievers?

FATHER MURRAY

Brother Ballou, Brother Ballou—the sheep are *clearly* to represent the human race and the goats those devils who will receive the eternal punishment. Can you not see it, man, open your eyes!

FATHER BALLOU

Father Murray, as the scripture tells it, those who were on the left hand of the throne were accused of not having visited the sick. Do you think it is a desirable thing to have *the devils* visit the sick or that they should be condemned to everlasting punishment for having neglected that duty?^{vii}

(Exit MURRAY. Enter GOSSIP ONE)

GOSSIP ONE

This is Mr. Ballou, I suppose?

FATHER BALLOU

Yes, ma'am, my name is Ballou.

GOSSIP ONE

Well, Mr. Ballou, they say you hold that all men will be saved. Do you really believe that doctrine?

FATHER BALLOU

Yes, ma'am. I really believe it.

GOSSIP ONE

Why sir! Do you really believe that all men are going to be saved just such creatures *as they are*?

FATHER BALLOU

What is that you have in your hand, dear woman?

GOSSIP ONE

Why—it is my mop!

FATHER BALLOU

Your mop? Well, what are you going to do with it?

GOSSIP ONE

I am going to mop up my floor. I always do it on Saturday afternoon.

FATHER BALLOU

Well, sister, I understand you. Are you going to mop it up *just as it is*?

GOSSIP ONE

Mop it up just as it is?

FATHER BALLOU

Yes, you wished to know if I hold that all men will be saved *just as they are*. Do you intend to mop up the floor *just as it is*?

GOSSIP ONE

Why, I mop it up to clean it.

FATHER BALLOU

True. You do not require it to be made clean before you will consent to mop it up. God saves men to purify them, that's what salvation is designed for. God does not require men to be pure in order that he may save them. ^{viii}

GOSSIP ONE

(shaking head)

Your language is plain enough and yet the words are so strange.

FATHER BALLOU

How about these: 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?^{ix}

GOSSIP ONE

I do not know—you talk in riddles, dangerous riddles!

(Exit ALL)

(Enter GOSSIP ONE and TWO, RESTORATIONIST and FATHER BALLOU)

GOSSIP TWO

At one dash you strike out the doctrine of a future judgment, the displeasure of God against the sinner and all future punishments. Why you open the gates of heaven to the most depraved among mankind, and showing a broad, instead of narrow way, to eternal life!^x

FATHER BALLOU

We are not only at liberty to reject all ideas which have been established by tradition without proper evidence, but it is our religious duty so to do. ^{xi}

RESTORATIONIST

What do you say to the words of the great Jonathan Edwards? “Sinners *deserve* to be cast into hell; so that divine justice never stands in the way, it makes no objection against God's using his power *at any moment* to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary, justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins.”^{xii}

FATHER BALLOU

Perfect confidence in the truth of God and God's love and the fact that the truth is great and will prevail has inspired me with great courage to go forward and prosecute the Christian warfare.^{xiii}

GOSSIP ONE

(to audience)

Warfare indeed! If he takes away Hell, he takes away the *purpose* of religion!

(Exit ALL)

NARRATOR

Scene III. A Heretic for Eternity

They called what he preached blasphemy. And yet, while he was alive, Universalism was the fourth largest religion in a young and inquisitive United States of America....

(Enter BALLOU, HUGH and EUNICE)

FATHER BALLOU

My young friends, do not be discouraged at the embarrassments which lie around you. When your humble servant commenced his career in life, he could not count ten individuals who had opened their lips on this continent in advocating our doctrine and not more than two or three societies professing to believe as we do. What a change I have lived to see!

My enemies will endeavor to stop the people's ears and see with their eyes and be converted. What, no future judgment! Is there to be no distinction in the world to come between the righteous and the wicked? Are saints and sinners all to fare alike? It is then no matter what we do? We may indulge in all matters of iniquity. We may neglect the duties of religion; lie, steal, defraud; indulge in drunkenness and gluttony, together with base uncleanness, and all is just as well. ... Look around at society. Do misery and wretchedness mark the footsteps of religion, virtue, temperance, prudence, industry, economy, justice, love and mercy? No, my brethren, this is not the case.

After all, what is this religion which is founded on the fear of human misery? Is there any real sincerity in it? Is there any of the true love of God in this religion? "Perfect love casts out fear; he who feareth is not made perfect in love." You provide for your companion and your dependent offspring because you love them and your duty is perfect delight. Can you honestly say you would not give your children bread when they are hungry, if you were not afraid of everlasting punishment hereafter?^{xiv}

EUNICE

Look, none of us, Unitarian OR Universalist care about the hell thing anymore. Hosea was okay, though. You can't dislike a guy who thought people should be free to find their own faith and use reason at that.

HUGH

I wonder if he would have seen it as freedom or discipline?

EUNICE

Okay—you can tell me *I'm* going to hell, you can tell me I am damned, but don't start spouting about discipline. Then I really see my dad.

HUGH

I just mean that it isn't easy to find your own way, to really think and figure out what you believe. That's work—discipline--for me. It isn't just freedom to believe, it is the freedom to work out your own path.

EUNICE

Whoa! Are *you* channeling Hosea now?

HUGH

He IS our ancestor –of thought, I mean. His path led to the ones that matter to us today.

EUNICE

Thought ancestor? Hmmmm. Maybe that's what I need. I wonder what he's doing for the holidays next year?

(Exit ALL. Enter BALLOU and GOSSIP TWO)

GOSSIP TWO

You just from Nantucket, I suppose?

FATHER BALLOU

Yes.

GOSSIP ONE

Well, they say old Ballou is over there, preaching his heresy. Did you see him?

FATHER BALLOU

Yes, I saw him.

GOSSIP TWO

Well, he's a rough old fellow. I don't like him.

FATHER BALLOU

Why not?

GOSSIP ONE

Because he preaches that all men will be saved and go to heaven in their sins and no man in his senses can believe that!

FATHER BALLOU

But...did you ever hear him preach?

GOSSIP TWO

No, I hope not!

FATHER BALLOU

Then you may be misinformed as to what he does preach. Now I think he would say, if he were here, that he did not believe nor preach as you have represented.

GOSSIP ONE

But what does he believe then?

FATHER BALLOU

I think he would say that sinners are to be saved *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. Christ came to save the world *from* sin, not *in* sin.

GOSSIP TWO

(with growing suspicion)

If I may be so bold, where do *you* live when at home?

FATHER BALLOU

I live in Boston.

GOSSIP ONE

Whose church do you attend?

FATHER BALLOU

Mr. Ballou's church.

GOSSIP TWO

(with trepidation)

Wh-What is your name?

FATHER BALLOU

My name is Ballou.^{xv}

This work is based in large part on Ernest Cassara's book. *Hosea Ballou: The Challenge to Orthodoxy*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: Cambridge Cornerstone Press: 2003.

ⁱ Ernest Cassara's book. *Hosea Ballou: The Challenge to Orthodoxy*. Cambridge: Massachusetts: Cambridge Cornerstone Press: 2003. p. 167

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 20

^{iv} Ibid, p. 137

^v Ibid, p. 37

^{vi} <http://members.aol.com/jonathanedw/Sinners.html>

^{vii} Ibid, p. 38

^{viii} Ibid, p. 148-149

^{ix} Ibid, p. 150

^x Ibid, p. 97

^{xi} Ibid, p. 98

^{xii} <http://members.aol.com/jonathanedw/Sinners.html>

^{xiii} Ibid, p. 133

^{xiv} Ibid, p. 107-108

^{xv} Ibid, p. 112