

Hosea Ballou, Son of Richmond, Father of Universalism

By Sister Mary Monica, M.I.C.M., Tert.

Editor’s Introduction: *The following piece is about a home-town boy of ours, one from Richmond, New Hampshire, where this journal is published. While for us it has “local flavor,” we think it worthy of publishing for two reasons. First of all, it is a case study in how false sects come about: sinful men, more or less influenced by the spirit of their day, consider the revelations of God as something they have to “figure out,” instead of receiving them with docility from God’s chosen teaching authority, the Church, the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Secondly, this story teaches a lesson about heresiarchs, i.e., founders of heretical sects: they need not appear to be fire-breathing, deranged lunatics. Hosea Ballou looks like a “nice guy.” He was clever, homespun, endearingly rough around the edges, and seems to have had a genuine love for his family. All the same, the religion he spun out was evil — pure and simple; and it kept him and his followers from God, their final end.*

*His story should make us question ourselves: are we **nice** in a natural sense, or are we **pleasing to God** in the supernatural sense?*

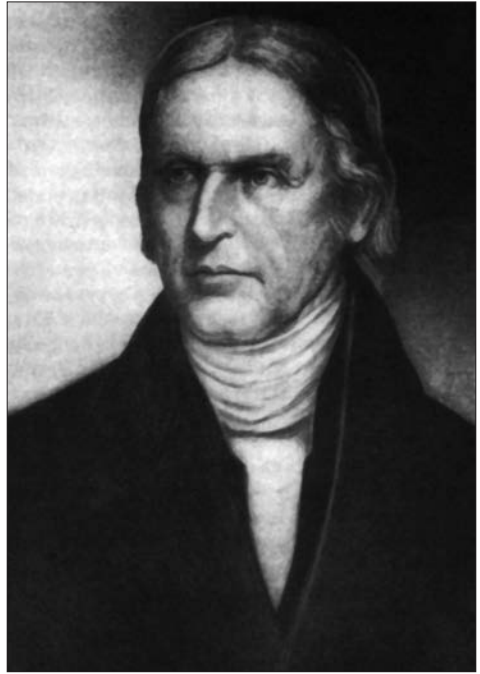
More than any other section of the United States, New England is made up of many small villages and towns. Across the various states that make up this region of our country, thousands of Americans live in hundreds — perhaps thousands — of picturesque places. One of the smallest towns in the state of New Hampshire is Richmond, located in the extreme southwest corner of the state, a short drive from Massachusetts to the south and Vermont to the west. Our readers know Richmond as the home of St. Benedict Center — “Pope’s Corner” to many of the non-Catholic locals. Long before this haven of Traditional Catholicism found its home in the town, Richmond’s claim to fame was as the birthplace of one Hosea Ballou, credited with being the American founder of Universalism.

In the days of Colonial America, the area that is now New Hampshire was literally the wild frontier. Richmond traces its beginnings from a 1752 grant of the British monarchy given to one Sylvester Rogers (or Rocherson) who came from Rhode Island and cleared an acre of ground. The two nearest settlements, Winchester to the west and Fitzwilliam to the east, were already established. Life was not easy in this part of the colonies: the

winters were long and hard; the summers could be hot and sultry. The soil was poor and rocky and not good for farming, and wild animals were a constant threat. This was an area that would attract only the hardest of souls in the beginning.

Disclaimers

This article is not the life of a saint. It is a brief look at a man who produced a false religion. His particular false religion was one of the many varieties of aberrant Christianity known as Protestantism. In order to tell his story without heaping cumbersome derision on “Old Ballou,” we will tell his story simply, as we received it from the available biographies. If, at times, natural virtues or admirable traits are pointed out in our subject, or if he is ever cast in a sympathetic light for certain difficulties he underwent, it all testifies to two realities: that all men have some fingerprint of their Creator on them which occasionally shows up in admirable traits, even in the very worst; and that the common lot of the good and the bad — suffering — should elicit feelings of sympathy in this vale of tears. That will change on the Day of Judgment, when God’s perfect sentence is passed, and the elect will see the perfect wisdom of the Thrice Holy God in damning the reprobate.



Because the article explores some inner dynamics of Protestantism, at times certain words have to be employed in an analogous sense. For instance, “orthodox” Protestants (*who were by no means orthodox!*) were Calvinists. Also, the terms “conservative,” and “liberal” are used to distinguish various trends and sects, whereas we know that *all Protestants* are liberal, believing in their own *liberty* to put a personal “spin” on the Bible.

Quakers and Baptists

It must be said at the outset that there were almost no Catholics in the New England colonies. In fact, at the time of the Revolutionary