



3-20-2017

The Passion of the Infant Christ: Critical Edition

Caryll Houselander

Kerry S. Walters
Gettysburg College

Roles

Author:

Caryll Houselander

Editor:

Kerry S. Walter, Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/books>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Houselander, Caryll. *The Passion of the Infant Christ: Critical Edition*. Kerry Walters, ed. Eugene, WA: Wipf and Stock, 2017.

This is the publisher's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution.

Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/books/118>

This open access book is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

The Passion of the Infant Christ: Critical Edition

Description

Although forgotten until quite recently, Caryll Houselander, who died in 1954, was a sensitive and profound English Roman Catholic writer on Christian spirituality. In this critical edition of her 1949 book *The Passion of the Infant Christ*, Houselander argues that the physical world is an "in-scaped" revelation of the mind of the Creator. Every concrete object and every temporal event mirrors the eternal, just as the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus mirror the circumstances surrounding his death and resurrection.

Editor Kerry Walters discusses both Houselander's life and the primary themes of *The Passion of the Infant Christ* in his introduction to this critical edition of one of Houselander's most insightful books.

Keywords

Caryll Houselander, spirituality, Catholicism, Jesus Christ, inescaped revelation

Disciplines

Catholic Studies | Christianity | Philosophy

Publisher

Wipf and Stock

ISBN

9781498234153

Comments

Professor Walters' introduction available by clicking the download link above.

Editor's Introduction

An "Inscaped" Universe

*The basic fact of the Christ-life
is the Indwelling Presence of Christ.*

—CARYLL HOUSELANDER¹

In *The Tablet's* obituary announcing Caryll Houselander's death (an obituary, by the way, in which the editor consistently misspelled her name), Monsignor Ronald Knox, probably the best-known English Roman Catholic of his day and himself an accomplished author, was quoted as giving her high praise. Knox observed,

In all she wrote, there was a candor as of childhood; she seemed to see everything for the first time, and the driest of doctrinal considerations shone out like a restored picture when she had finished with it. And her writing was always natural; she seemed to find no difficulty in getting the right word; no, not merely the right word, the telling word, that left you gasping.²

Still, Knox went on to wonder if Houselander's work would be remembered. Although he clearly hoped it would, the melancholy tone to the very asking of the question suggests he suspected otherwise.

Knox's fear has proven correct, at least to a certain extent. Although virtually forgotten until quite recently—an anonymity presaged, perhaps,

1. Caryll Houselander, *The Passion of the Infant Christ* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), Introduction.

2. Ronald Knox, "Miss Caryll Houslander [sic]," *The Tablet* (23 October 1954).

by *The Tablet's* failure to get the spelling of her name right only days after her death—Caryll Houselander (1901–1954) was one of the most insightful English spiritual authors of her generation. In a line of written work that included spirituality, novels, poetry, and children's stories, she offered an account of the Christian life that was deeply incarnational, centered on perceiving Christ's presence in oneself and, indeed, throughout all creation and focused on treating our fellow creatures with the tender love we owe Christ. Her *The Passion of the Infant Christ*, published in 1949, is one of her finest presentations of this vision. Unfortunately, while many of her other books have been reprinted in the last decade or so, *The Passion of the Infant Christ*, one of her very best, has been relegated to the dusty shelves of secondhand book shops.

HOUSELANDER'S LIFE³

Picture a young woman in her early twenties riding on a London underground train jam-packed, as she later described it, with “sitting and strap-hanging workers of every description going home at the end of the day.” Her appearance is striking, even bizarre. She is wearing oversized, thick eyeglasses and has flaming red hair. Her face is painted white with, in the words of an acquaintance, “some abominable chalky-white substance,” and her upper lip is stained “dandelion-yellow” from the cigarettes she endlessly smokes.⁴

The young woman has a troubled inner life. A miserable and lonely childhood has left her somewhat reclusive, susceptible to panic attacks, and probably afflicted with eating disorders. She has a sharp tongue and is sometimes too fond of using it. An intense seeker of God, she is deeply alienated from the Roman Catholic Church in which she was confirmed. She still reels from a recent unhappy love affair whose aftermath left her even more lonely than she normally is. She's at a low point in her life.

Then, out of the blue, jostling along on the tube and gazing wearily at her fellow passengers, something happens to her that transfigures her jaded way of seeing the world.

3. Much of this section is adapted from my book *The Art of Dying and Living: Lessons from Saints of Our Time* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011) 190–218.

4. Maisie Ward, *Caryll Houselander: That Divine Eccentric* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1962) 123. Ward was Caryll's friend and publisher. To date, this is the only book-length biography of Houselander.

Quite suddenly I saw with my mind, but as vividly as a wonderful picture, Christ in them all. But I saw more than that; not only was Christ in every one of them, living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them—but because He was in them, and because they were here, the whole world was here too, here in this underground train; not only the world as it was at that moment, not only all the people in all the countries of the world, but all those people who had lived in the past, and all those yet to come.⁵

Nor does the vision end as soon as the young woman arrives at her station. When she walks out onto the street and gazes at all the pedestrians scurrying to wherever they're going, she sees the same thing. "On every side, in every passer-by, everywhere—Christ."⁶

The young woman was Caryll Houselander, and the vision was the herald for her of a new way of looking at the world. She had experienced an earlier vision while still a child, in which she saw a nun as the thorn-crowned embodiment of Christ's sorrow, and another as a teenager in which she saw the murdered Russian Czar Nicholas and his family as martyred saints. For Caryll, her first vision brought home to her the fact that Christ's Passion is eternal, reenacted whenever and wherever humans suffer; the second pressed home for her the Kingship of Christ; the third showed her that Christ was embodied in ordinary humans everywhere.

Houselander was born in October 1901. She was such a "small and odd"⁷ infant that neither her mother nor her maternal uncle, a gynecologist who assisted at the delivery, expected her to live for more than a few hours. A Protestant clergyman was urgently summoned to baptize her, but Caryll's mother and uncle so offended him with their nervous giggles that he stomped out of the house in the middle of the rite. So Caryll's uncle completed the baptism, using a salad bowl as a font and naming his niece after a favorite sailing yacht.

Caryll's mother and father, Gertrude and Wilmot, were singularly unsuited for parenthood. Fond of sports and society life, both were much more comfortable on horseback or in a tennis court than in a nursery. Wilmot was pretty much an absentee father, while Gertrude ran emotionally hot and cold, sometimes smothering Caryll and her older sister Ruth

5. Caryll Houselander, *A Rocking-Horse Catholic* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955) 137–38. Caryll's sister, Ruth, complained that at least some of the stories about her childhood Caryll recounts in this memoir are more imaginative than actual.

6. *Ibid.*, 138.

7. *Ibid.*, 3.

with attention, sometimes exiling them to the exclusive and lonely care of nurses and nannies.

During one of Gertrude's smothering periods, she got it into her head that it would be good for her two daughters to become Catholics. Caryll was six years old at the time, and the sudden switch from living in a religiously indifferent household to one that revolved around Gertrude's newly-found and rather manic faith was hard on her. She especially resented having to spend all her pocket money on "deplorable statues, flower vases, flowers, lamps and candles and candlesticks, as well as lace and linen cloth"⁸ for the homemade altars Gertrude insisted the girls make. The long hours of kneeling before them demanded by Gertrude rankled as well. When as an adult Caryll warned against heavy-handed zealotry, she knew what she was talking about.

Incredibly, none of this forced piety was supplemented in the slightest way by religious instruction. Gertrude either saw no need to teach her daughters anything about the faith or, given her hot-and-cold temperament, she lost her fervor as suddenly as she had found it. In either case, whatever Caryll learned of Christianity in those early years was picked up from a family friend named George Spencer Bower, whom she affectionately called "Smoky."

Bower was an agnostic who admired the intellectual rigor of the Catholic tradition even though he couldn't accept its beliefs, and he shared his love of Catholic theology and English literature with Caryll. The two of them often read Shakespeare together. Caryll remembered once reciting Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene, "but hindered from giving it the full dramatic force that I should have liked to do by Smoky's little dog, Spot, who, used to nothing but gentleness and welcome from Smoky and me, would look bewildered and startled at the words, 'Out, damned Spot!'"⁹ Caryll discovered in Smoky not only an able teacher but also a surrogate parent. He gave her the loving attention her own parents did not.

Despite Bower's tutelage in theology, Caryll, put off by Gertrude's zeal, was conflicted about her faith. She made her first Confession and Communion when she was eight, but only after weeks of inner turmoil. Emotionally exhausted by the ordeal, she fell into a protracted illness that manifested physical symptoms of paralysis, breathlessness, and fever.

8. *Ibid.*, 31.

9. *Ibid.*, 23.

Incredible though it may seem for an eight-year-old child, Caryll also suffered from a morbid sense of guilt, no doubt instilled in her by her mother. She reached a turning point, however, when she realized "in a dim, intuitive way that it was not something I had done that required forgiveness, but everything that I was that required to be miraculously transformed. It was of myself that I required to be healed."¹⁰ As she later recognized, her illness had certainly sprung from anxiety and panic. The sense of relief that came to her when she recognized her deep woundedness for what it was—injury caused by the manner in which she was raised rather than sinfulness on her part—was liberating. Her physical symptoms ceased and her religious ambivalence was replaced with a grateful sense of dependency on God.

Over the next few years, Caryll sorely needed her new faith. Shortly after her illness and breakthrough, her parents divorced. The split was no surprise to family acquaintances, but it dealt a devastating and totally unanticipated blow to Caryll. Her scar went deep; she would write in several of her books about the misery that befalls children in unhappy families.

After the divorce, Caryll and her sister were sent to Catholic boarding schools, a period in which she suffered greatly from loneliness and boredom. She left school while still in her mid-teens and took up a number of odd jobs to support herself. It was during this time that she became disenchanted with the Catholic Church, although not with Christianity. The final straw for her, or at least so she thought, was the rudeness with which an usher treated her one morning at Mass. She left the chapel, and the Church, for nearly a decade.

Slowly and sometimes painfully, Caryll began to find herself. Having a natural talent for drawing and painting, she won a scholarship to London's Saint John's Art school and gratefully discovered a kinship with its bohemian students. By the time she hit her twenties, she was supporting herself by painting lampshades and drawing commercial prints. She also fell head over heels in love with a man nearly thirty years her senior, the Russian-born spy Sidney Reilly, who eventually broke her heart when he left her for another woman. She apparently shied away from further deeply romantic relationships with men for the rest of her life.

In 1925, Caryll met a woman who would become her closest companion, and without whom it's doubtful that *The Passion of the Infant Christ* would have ever been written. Iris Wyndham, a wealthy young Londoner,

10. *Ibid.*, 46.

hired Caryll to decorate a nursery for her only child Joan. The two became friends, and when Iris divorced a short while later, she invited Caryll to come live with her. "Though in temperament we are so unlike," Caryll observed, "the friendship and love between us is like a rock: it is a thing we both do not cease to thank God for."¹¹

The decade leading up to World War II was busy and fulfilling for Caryll. She was spiritually enriched by finally returning to the Church, and she began to make a name for herself as a specialist in church decoration and restoration. Significant for her later career as an author, she also tried her hand at writing by contributing stories, most of them written for children, to a couple of Catholic magazines. She also organized several like-minded friends into an aid society for the poor, especially refugees from Hitler's Germany, appropriately called "Loaves and Fishes."

Unlike many of their countrymen in the late 1930s, Caryll and Iris saw that war with the Third Reich was inevitable, and in the autumn of 1939, one year after Hitler annexed the Sudetenland and six months after he invaded Czechoslovakia, they began taking classes in First Aid and civil defense. "I hate war," Caryll wrote to an acquaintance, "[but] I would never be a pacifist because in taking part in a war one takes one's share of the common burdens."¹² Although she couldn't actually fight in the coming conflict, she wanted to do her part.

When the Nazi bombing of London began, Caryll worked for a few months in a First Aid Post, a position she found physically and emotionally exhausting. "I have had some very, very bad moments, with a sheer physical desire to weep."¹³ After a few months, she switched to a less stressful day job in the Censorship Office, and also volunteered as a fire spotter at night.

Despite the war—including the bombed destruction of the flat she and Iris occupied—her faith both endured and flourished. Although she continued to write children's stories, she began writing and publishing the books on spirituality that are her legacy. In 1941, she published to wide acclaim *This War Is the Passion*, in which she drew a parallel between the war-time suffering inflicted by Nazi Germany and Christ's suffering at the hands

11. Ibid., 140.

12. Wendy M. Wright, ed., *Caryll Houselander: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 73–74. Wright's anthology of Caryll's writings cleverly and seamlessly weaves in an excellent biographical overview.

13. Caryll Houselander, "Letter to Baroness Bosch van Drakestein" (2 September 1939), in *The Letters of Caryll Houselander*, ed. Maisie Ward (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965) 31.

of Rome. A meditation on the Blessed Virgin, *The Reed of God*, followed three years later, and a collection of poetry, *The Flowering Tree*, appeared in 1945. Caryll also worked steadily as an illustrator and woodcarver, primarily for churches. For all its horrors, the war seemed to free her creativity.

In her *Tablet* obituary mentioned earlier, Father Knox singled out Caryll's *This War Is the Passion* as a much appreciated work. "I suppose I am in the position of many others when I say that the deepest debt I owe her is for *This War is the Passion*." She was, Knox said, one of the few writers "who helped to make war-time tolerable without for a moment taking your mind off it."

Given the book's popularity, it is not surprising that it brought Caryll a flood of requests for spiritual advice. Letters arrived daily, unannounced visitors seeking a few moments of her time showed up on her doorstep, and Caryll found herself spending hours offering counseling. Her reputation as a sensitive spiritual director grew, and in 1942 the eminent English psychologist Dr. Eric Strauss invited her to work with war-traumatized patients. Much of the aid Caryll offered them was in the form of art therapy. By encouraging patients to express themselves in paint, charcoal, clay, wood, or verse, Caryll helped them express and break through their pain and repression. She also worked closely with war-traumatized adolescents, whom she referred to as "Christ-children." Her experiences with them and their suffering is obvious in *The Passion of the Infant Christ*.

But without doubt, the single most important influence on *The Passion of the Infant Christ*, as well as one of the most significant events in her personal and spiritual life, was the 1947 birth of Iris's granddaughter Clare. Joan, Clare's mother, as well as her father, were still university students when she was born, and were even more clueless when it came to raising children than Caryll's own parents had been. So Iris stepped in and, with her daughter and son-in-law's consent, brought the infant back to the flat she shared with Caryll.

Initially, Caryll wasn't crazy about the new situation. Although in the post-war years she dreamed occasionally of several big projects—opening a Catholic bookstore was one of her favorites—what she really wanted to do was devote herself to writing. But the steady stream of people seeking her spiritual counsel whittled away at her time, and she found herself forced to grab moments of undisturbed privacy in which to write whenever she could. She feared that the addition of an infant to the household would

interfere with her writing even more. To make matters worse, she knew nothing and cared less about caring for babies.

But Caryll soon discovered that Clare immeasurably enriched her life. The middle-aged spinster with next to no experience of infants was awed and delighted by the child's presence, and before long loved her with all her heart. A photograph of the two of them taken in 1948 tells the whole story. Caryll, seated on a bench, holds Clare in her lap. Clare stares boldly at the photographer, while Caryll's gaze is characteristically shy, focused downward and inward. But there's an expression of such deep maternal love on her face that the photograph looks like an icon of the adoring Madonna holding the Christ child.

Caryll discerned in Clare's delight in the world the childlikeness that became integral to her *The Passion of the Infant Christ*. Through her relationship with the baby, she came to appreciate as never before the wisdom of Jesus' observation that "unless you become like little children again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 18:3) A child, Caryll discovered firsthand—and perhaps, under Clare's influence, also remembered from her own childhood—is innocently receptive. His way of looking at the world isn't cluttered with theories, abstractions, presuppositions, and judgments. Instead, he gratefully accepts the world for the enchanted thing it is. "In little things of no value he receives the Sacrament of the Universe; his jewels are chips of salted and frosted glass that he finds on the sea shore; he listens for the sound of the sea in a hollow shell, and he hears the song of God."¹⁴

Caryll died on October 12, 1954, shortly before her fifty-third birthday. She had been in failing health in her last few years, suffering from bouts of pneumonia, breast cancer, and occasional moments of mental confusion. But she took her dying with an equanimity born of deep faith. In one of the last manuscripts she completed, her posthumously published *The Risen Christ* (another book that Monsignor Fox praised in her obituary), Caryll reflected on the mystery of death with the sensitivity and insight that readers had come to expect of her.

Sickness, old age, death, these must come; and when they come it seems that our service is ended. There is an exhaustion which makes it first an effort, then an impossibility, to lift the hand up to make the sign of the cross; no more liturgical acts in daily life, gestures and symbols that worship God and give Christ's love.

14. Houselander, *Passion of the Infant Christ*, Chapter VI.

Everything falls away from us, even memories—even the weariness of self. This is the breaking of the bread, the supreme moment in the prayer of the body, the end of the liturgy of our mortal lives, when we are broken for and in the communion of Christ's love to the whole world.¹⁵

THE PASSION OF THE INFANT CHRIST

Houselander had a puckish sense of humor, and she displays it in the very first line of her book. "There are some truths," she writes, "which need to be told over and over." Repetition, reiterating things "over and over," is the theme that underlies everything she has to say in *Passion*.

The pattern of the universe is duplicated in every created thing; the birth of Christ in Bethlehem is repeated in his suffering and death at Calvary; the gestation of Jesus in Mary's womb is reiterated, at least potentially, in us: just as seed needs to rest in the earth's soil in order to flourish, so the Seed needs to rest in the soul's soil to spring forth; and so on. Everywhere in the universe, the Christ-event is ceaselessly recapitulated. Christ is ever aborning, in us, in the world, and on the altar every time a host is consecrated. "There is incarnation everywhere," writes Houselander, "everywhere the infant Christ is born; every day the infant Christ makes the world new."¹⁶

Borrowing a word from the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, Houselander called this repetition "inscape." It is not entirely clear what Hopkins meant by inscape or its associated term, "instress." But most critics agree that he probably intended them to designate, respectively, the unique identity or "thisness" of each thing in existence, and an observer's awareness, often sudden and unexpected, of a thing's thisness.

Houselander, however, means something rather different, and implicitly acknowledges her movement away from Hopkins when she confesses to using "inscape" to refer to "what it does for me." For her, inscape designates a universal template common to everything that exists, be it "a flower, the ring on a bird's feather, a fish's scale, and so on." Nothing is too small or insignificant to be stamped with "the pattern in creation of the Creator." Nor is anything too great or profound. The transfiguration atop Mount Tabor, for example, is a dramatic revealing of the inscaped mind and intention of God. If we could but learn to experience or instress our

15. Caryll Houselander, *The Risen Christ* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958) 73-74.

16. Houselander, *Passion of the Infant Christ*, Chapter X.

surroundings, we would see the divine inscape shining out of everything.¹⁷ The world in which we dwell is everywhere patterned on ceaseless repetitions of the divine inscape.

What this means is that events or things that seem to be quite different from one another, or even at cross-purposes, in fact are closely related. Houselander aims to make this point in the three subthemes of her *Passion of the Infant Christ*. The first is that key events in the Christ-child's infancy are mirrored in the subsequent Passion of Jesus three decades later. His beginning, in other words, was also his end, and his end his beginning. The second is that we're called to imitate or repeat Mary's obedient carrying and nurturing of the Christ-child. The third is that we're also called to recapitulate, through our intentions and behavior, the childlike innocence of the child Jesus to whom we give birth and for whom we lovingly care.

Christ's Passion is embedded within his infancy (or, in other words, the one is inscaped in the other) in several ways, all of which Houselander examines in Chapter 5. In Bethlehem, for example, the child emerged from the darkness of Mary's womb; after Calvary, the Risen Lord emerged from the darkness of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. In Bethlehem, the Christ child was helpless; at Calvary, Jesus is likewise. In Bethlehem, the infant was proclaimed king; the same proclamation was tacked onto his Cross.

Christ is also inscaped in us. As Meister Eckhart famously said in one of his Christmas sermons, we are all Christ-bearers. Houselander makes the same point this way: "There is incarnation everywhere—everywhere the infant Christ is born; every day the infant Christ makes the world new."¹⁸ We participate in that renewal by making sure that the inscaped Christ-child within us is cherished, nurtured, and allowed to flourish. We take on Mary's task of giving the world its Messiah, as he is embodied in each of us. "Our humanity," writes Houselander, "is to clothe [the Christ-child]. Our love to be the four walls that shelter Him. Our life to sustain Him."¹⁹

How do we clothe, love, and sustain the Christ-child, such that we both nurture him and in the process allow him to change our lives—just as Clare did Caryll's? By recognizing and accepting reality instead of retreating into fantasy. Houselander warns that we have a tendency to avoid the truth about who we are. We can become trapped in a state of "devitalization," or spiritually arrested development, remaining childish instead of

17. Ibid., Chapter III.

18. Ibid., Chapter V.

19. Ibid., Chapter IX.

childlike, either clinging to an immature Sunday School version of God, or petulantly stamping our foot in adolescent defiance of God. In either case, we deny reality and thereby orphan or abandon the Christ-child.

Because the child never died in Christ—to the end of his days, he comported himself with the humility, simplicity, trust, and unalloyed love that Houselander associates with the innocence of children—the way to sustain him and honor his presence in us is to cultivate those same qualities ourselves. God in his wisdom has made this easy. Surrendering to a helpless infant, notes Houselander, is the one thing that most people can't resist. But at the same time, surrender demands that we give our all to the baby, allowing its needs and wants to re-set the pattern of our lives. When we take on this responsibility, we begin to shed those desires and activities that interfere with the task of nurturing the beloved child, and consequently our lives become simpler, although busier, and more radiant with love. "In the service of [an] infant, we are made whole."²⁰ In the service of the Christ-child, we enter into the blessing of full personhood.

But there is another consequence of becoming more and more like the Christ-child who indwells us. Because Calvary is already present in Bethlehem, the suffering that Jesus endured on the Cross is inscaped within the Christ-child. If we live the Christ-life, gladly bending our wills to the Christ within, we will also suffer. In fact, the more we're grounded in Christ, the greater our suffering will be, because our hearts become increasingly responsive to the poverty, sorrow, homelessness, alienation, and sin that besmirch God's creation. "Those who are Christocentric, in whom Christ waxes strong, expand and are wide open to the grief of the world. They are wide as the Arms of the Crucified are wide, and their hearts, unable to contain the world's suffering in themselves, break open, as Christ's did, and let the torrent of His pity sweep through them."²¹

Yet the suffering isn't merely a response to a sometimes tragic and unjust world, valuable as feeling Christ-pity for others is. Suffering is also redemptive. We know by faith that Jesus's suffering at Calvary renews the world by taking on its sin and defeating the death that sin inflicts. If we embrace the Christ-child inscaped in us—the child who in turn inscapes the crucified and risen Christ—then our suffering necessarily participates in Christ's redemptive sacrifice. This isn't a position unique to Houselander. Thirty years after her death, Saint John Paul II explored the mystery of

20. *Ibid.*, Chapter IV.

21. *Ibid.* Chapter IX.

shared redemptive suffering in his *Salvifici doloris*. Suffering, he said, is always an evil. But it is not meaningless because of its participation in Christ's redemptive suffering. This is a conclusion with which Houselander would have heartily agreed. For someone as sensitive to the suffering of others as she was, it offered a way of thinking about human pain that infused meaning into it and made coping with it possible.

Although she does not use the word in *Passion*, Houselander's message is what she called "christing" (pronounced with a long "i") in other places. Christing is the new way of being or "transubstantiation" that happens to us when we discern the Christ-child in ourselves and in the world writ large, and labor lovingly to help others see the same.²² When we embrace christing, we see that "Christ is among us, his heart like a rose expanding within us."²³ This insight is beautifully captured in the well-known prayer attributed to St. Patrick, and which Houselander undoubtedly knew.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me;
 Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
 Christ to right of me, Christ to left of me;
 Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising;
 Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
 Christ on the tongue of all who speak to me,
 Christ in the eye of all who see me,
 Christ in the ear of all who hear me.²⁴

At the end of the day, Houselander's message in *The Passion of the Infant Christ* is that the entire universe bears the imprint of its Maker, and that humans are unique in that we're capable of recognizing that divine pattern or inscape not only in the world and in others, but also in ourselves. When we do, the Christ-child within the wombs of our souls stirs. As Houselander wrote in a letter shortly after World War II erupted, "nothing now is more needed than a continual Christ-bearing into this world": carrying Christ, birthing Christ, and comporting oneself with the innocence and love of the Christ-child.²⁵

22. Caryll Houselander, *The Comforting of Christ* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1947) 8.

23. Caryll Houselander, *The Flowering Tree* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1945) 33.

24. Oliver Davies, ed. *Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) 120.

25. Caryll Houselander, "Letter to Baroness Bosch van Drakestein" (19 September 1939), in *Caryll Houselander, Essential Writings*, 79.

PRIMARY WORKS BY CARYLL HOUSELANDER²⁶

This War is the Passion (1941)

The Reed of God (1944)

The Splendor of the Rosary: With Prayers by Caryll Houselander and Pictures by Fra Angelico by Maisie Ward (1945)

The Flowering Tree (1945)

The Dry Wood (1947)

The Passion of the Infant Christ (1949)

Guilt (1952)

The Comforting of Christ (1954) [A revised edition of *This War Is the Passion*]

A Rocking-Horse Catholic (1955)

The Way of the Cross (1955) [Includes Houselander's woodcuts of the fourteen stations]

Inside the Ark and Other Stories (1956)

Terrible Farmer Timson and Other Stories (1957)

The Risen Christ (1958)

Maisie Ward (ed.), *The Letters of Caryll Houselander: Her Spiritual Legacy* (1965)

Wendy Wright (ed.), *Caryll Houselander: Essential Writings* (2005)

Mary Lea Hill (ed.), *Christ in Our Midst: Wisdom from Caryll Houselander* (2013)

SECONDARY SOURCES

To date, only one biography has appeared, written by Houselander's friend and publisher Maisie Ward: *Caryll Houselander: That Divine Eccentric* (1962). But both Joyce Kemp in her *The Spiritual Path of Caryll Houselander* (2001) and Wendy Wright in her *Caryll Houselander: Essential Writings* (2005) offer biographical sketches.

26. All of Houselander's books (except the posthumous collections) were published by Sheed and Ward.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This edition of *The Passion of the Infant Christ* is taken from the book's first printing in 1949, published by Sheed and Ward. The first edition's dust cover was illustrated with one of Caryll's woodcuts, a pelican wounding its own breast to feed its young with its own lifeblood. This, of course, is a traditional symbol of Christ's self-sacrifice for the redemption of the world.

The biblical passages Caryll quotes are generally taken from the Douay-Rheims Old Testament and Ronald Knox's 1945 translation of the New Testament. She rarely cites chapter and verse, perhaps supposing that the readers of her day (unlike, alas, ours) would easily recognize the quoted passages. I've supplied, parenthetically, the appropriate citations. She most often quotes from the Gospel of John, in keeping with her high Christology.

Additionally, I've Americanized her British spellings. Unless indicated otherwise, all footnotes to her text are mine. Astericked divisions within chapters, however, are hers.

Readers will note that many of the paragraphs in this book are short, often comprised of but one sentence. As a consequence, Caryll's prose here has an aphoristic tone to it. Perhaps she was beginning to wear down from the ill health of her later years. But my guess is that her lapidary style in this book was a deliberate effort to encourage pause and reflection in her readers, so that they might recognize the Christ inscaped in them.