PREFACE

I wanted to write this preface earlier, for the first edition, but my publisher's deadline barely gave me time to put these articles in order.

They were originally commissioned by *Studi Cattolici* [an Italian journal of pastoral theology]. I had no intention of writing a book: they were simply a series of meditations, not arranged in any particular sequence, and I produced them with no great difficulty, for I was borrowing what I wrote.

To people like myself who sought his advice on the interior life, Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, often used to say that in his ministry as a priest he used "only one 'pot'," only one teaching, which was valid for everyone—that holiness should be sought in the context of one's everyday occupations. Each of us had a right to dip his spoon into this "pot" and help himself to whatever he needed, in his particular situation, to get nourishment. I, for one, did that time and time again; and later on I put pen to paper, turning my meditation into this book.

My purpose in writing was simply to comment on some of the teachings of Monsignor Escrivá. Really his contribution was much greater than mine: I had dipped so often into that "pot" that my commentary often amounted to no more than enlarging on something he said, paraphrasing him or even literally transcribing his way of putting things. You know what I mean: I was like a child in a toy shop who cannot make up his mind but wants to take everything, were he allowed.

I first met the founder of Opus Dei in 1940. It is difficult to explain all that meeting meant for me. Later on, in Rome, I was able to get to know him very well. He spoke always with great conviction, and he derived his energy from a strong interior life that was wrapped in an extraordinary naturalness; he set one on fire with divine fire. I have meditated on his teachings countless times and asked God to make them my very life, to help me learn to sanctify everything I do. I pray now that those who read these meditations may learn the same lesson.

As you read Jesus As Friend and some phrase enkindles in you the same fire, be in no doubt: the man to thank is Monsignor Escrivá, for he is the principal author of the thoughts you find in this book.

S. C.

JESUS AS FRIEND

Try to see that from their early youth or from adolescence they are inspired by an ideal—to seek Christ, to find Christ, to become Christ's friend, to follow Christ, to love Christ, to stay with Christ.

Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, October 24, 1942

In this handful of clay that we consist of—which you and I are—there is, we know, an immortal soul that tends toward God; and it desires God with all its strength, even when it denies him. This tendency toward God, this overpowering desire, this deep nostalgia, God himself wanted us to concentrate on the person of Christ, who lived on this earth as a man of flesh and blood, like you and me. God wants this love of ours to be love for God made man, whom we know and whom we understand, because he is one of us. He wanted it to be love for Jesus Christ, who is forever alive: there is his lovable face, his loving heart, the wounds in his hands and feet, and his open side. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13: 8).

Well, this same Jesus, who is perfect God and perfect man, who is way, truth, and life, who is the light of the world and the bread of life, can be our friend if you and I so wish. Listen to Saint Augustine, he speaks from the experience of an incisive mind and a great heart: "I can be God's friend if I so wish." But to achieve this friendship you and I must approach Jesus and get to know him and love him. Friendship with Jesus helps us make great progress; with him we shall find happiness and tranquility. We shall have sure standards to tell us always how we should behave; we shall be going toward our Father's house; and we shall, each of us, be another Christ, for that is why Jesus Christ became man: God became man so that man might become God.

Yet there are very many people who forget about Christ, or who do not know him or do not want to know him, who do not pray in Jesus' name, who do not pronounce the only name by which we can be saved, and who look on Jesus Christ as a figure in history, or as a faded glory, and forget that he came and lived