

# Preface

**A**lthough much of what follows is written in an academic register, the work is devotional. I think of it as a psalm or hymn of praise, one that reflects my imperfect understanding at the moment. Others might express similar sentiments, but they would, of course, employ different rationales and imagery. While I draw on poetry and some philosophical argument, these are meant to reinforce gospel understandings.

I am by training a philosopher, and contrary to what many may think would be the case, I have never felt religiously or spiritually threatened by philosophy. “The best thing about philosophy,” explained Emmanuel Levinas, a leading ethical philosopher and religious thinker of the twentieth century, “is that it fails.”<sup>1</sup> By failing, by never quite getting us as far as we wish, philosophy keeps us open and searching. And so also does every other endeavor that tries—initially, at least—to leave God out of the picture. We hit a wall of our own making and then must climb past

## ALL THE WAY TO HEAVEN

it with faith that something better exists beyond it. So whatever their unique path, all people reenact Abraham's journey toward "a city . . . which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

This little book reflects my path. It is one of many paths, and I am sure it is marked by error. Should you run across an idea you don't like, feel free to take it with a grain of salt. The central thesis—that God's love structures our mortal experience—is what I wish to pursue, with whatever limited means are available to me. As philosopher and visual artist John F. A. Taylor remarked, "We labor after light with tools of darkness."<sup>2</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Emmanuel Levinas, interview by Richard Kearney, *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (New York: SUNY Press, 1986), 22.
2. Quoted without source reference in Frank Webb, *Webb on Watercolor* (Cincinnati: North Light Books, 1990), 7.