

'P' creation stories in Genesis might have been stressed, but this is to split hairs. This book is a treasure trove for its subject, and a pleasure to read.

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Joseph Hazzaya, On providence. By Nestor Kavvadas. (Text and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 8.) Pp. vi + 212. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2016. €114. 978 90 04 32999 7
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Joseph Hazzaya, or 'the Seer', whose life spanned much of the eighth century, was one of a group of monastic authors of the Church of the East whose writings were condemned at a synod convened by Patriarch Timothy I in 786 (or 790: the date is uncertain). Born of Zoroastrian parents, he had been captured in a raid as a boy and sold as a slave; eventually liberated, he was converted to Christianity and became a monk, ending up as, in turn, a hermit and an abbot. Among those of his writings which have so far been published is an influential 'letter on the three stages of the spiritual life' which builds on, and draws together, the various strands that made up the teaching of the East Syriac monastic tradition; ironically this work has best been preserved in Syrian Orthodox manuscripts, where it is attributed to Philoxenos of Mabbug. The title, 'On providence', which has been given to the work which is published and translated here for the first time is a little misleading, since it suggests a treatise dealing with ideas of predestination and freewill, along the lines of those produced by several ninth-century Syriac (and other) authors. In fact 'On providence' does not feature at all in the ponderous title given in the late thirteenth-century manuscript which transmits the work: in essence this title states that the work concerns 'the care and mercy of God' towards human beings from Creation to 'the last times'. At the end comes a warning to readers not to misinterpret the teachings of the work, since 'we do not turn aside from the way of the Interpreter' (that is, Theodore of Mopsuestia). Like Isaac of Nineveh, Joseph was setting forth ideas about *apocatastasis* and a final universal salvation, which he knew would prove controversial in certain quarters of his Church. Interestingly, like another earlier author, Shubhalmaran, Joseph also provides an apocalyptic section to his work where Elijah plays a major role in opposing the 'Son of Perdition'. As Kavvadas points out in his succinct and helpful introduction, the historical background to Joseph's 'last times' was the deteriorating situation for Christians in northern Mesopotamia in the late eighth century, well witnessed in the contemporary Chronicle of Zuqin, with increasing numbers of conversions to Islam as a way of escaping oppression and economic misery. In making this significant work by Joseph available in an attractive format, with facing text and reliable translation, preceded by an illuminating introduction, Kavvadas has performed an excellent service. The book concludes with an index of names and main topics.

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