

Preface

THIS TEXT EMERGED FROM my doctoral thesis at the University of St. Michael's College. Many—if not most—doctoral projects materialize from a burning desire that a graduate student may have to write on a particular issue or question. This was not my situation. Unlike most graduate students, the only connection I had with usury prior to writing about it was the staggering debt that I accumulated in the course of my life as a student. I still recall, however, precisely when the decision was made to write on usury. My initial thesis proposal had been undercut at the very last minute when a member of the committee—who did not remain on the committee—informed me after all the work had been done that “no one cares about the ramblings of some long dead, long forgotten Byzantine emperor.” I sat in the office of my director, T. Allan Smith, and we thought about what to do next. He opened the *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur*, by Hans Georg Beck, and read quietly while I sat there in silence. He then looked up at me, shut the book and said “Usury. You can write about usury.” I trusted him, and therefore I was going to write about usury. Of course I am glad that I did, because also unlike most graduate students, I was not sick to death of my topic by the time I finished; rather, this project introduced me to the rich social justice theologies of the patristic world, and has thus shaped my scholarly agenda in ways I could not have anticipated at the time. I will, eventually, return to that “long dead, long forgotten” emperor; for now, this is sufficient.

As a thesis, it is expansive in its study of a singular topic, but the rationale and limitations of a thesis are worth noting. The purpose of *They Who Give from Evil: The Response of the Eastern Church to Moneylending in the Early Christian Era* is—after presentation of some of the scholarship done to date on the specific sermons of concern (chapter 1)—to consider the financial and salvific implications of usury on the community and the individual soul as it is addressed within the sermons of a selection of early

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Christian Greek authors, in the historical context of the fourth century Roman Empire. The principal limitation of this study is the exclusivity of my primary texts, as they are focused on the Greek East, rather than also including Latin theologians. This is because the two primary texts I work with—St. Basil's *Homily on Psalm Fourteen* and *Against Those Who Practice Usury* by St. Gregory of Nyssa—are Greek texts, and I know that it is not necessary to apologize for a limitation even as it is noted.

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