24 Silver (*Argentum*)

Sometimes silver is accepted literally for the material metal, from which arises concupiscence. Sometimes mystically it is taken for spiritual silver, which is eloquence.

First, silver is not to be loved although in use it is to be treated and this because of two matters. First, because it is the occasion of damnation, Eccli. 8[:3]: “For gold and silver have destroyed many and have reached even to the heart of kings.” Because of this silver[[1]](#endnote-1) is agreeably interpreted as if the burning of the nations. For even a bear through a sparkling basin is blinded.[[2]](#endnote-2) Because of this it is read that the leader of the Athenians, among the laws which he put forth, (banned) the use of gold and silver.[[3]](#endnote-3) As it were of all the schools a nobler metal is (not) to be found generated more deeply in the earth, and therefore to the place of its generation it refers, namely to the infernal region which, according to the saints,[[4]](#endnote-4) is next to the center of the earth. Therefore, it is said in Matt. 10[:9]: “Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses.” The virtue of the rejection of money is evident, Act. 3[:6]: “Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, I give you,” etc.

For this reason, Jerome says,[[5]](#endnote-5) if they did not have gold and silver, they have not had to cure a limp. Therefore, the Lord said, Deut. 7[:25]: “You shall not covet the silver and gold of which their idols are made.” 3 Kings 20[:1-3]: “Benadad, king of Syria, fought against Achab king of Israel because of his silver and gold.” Thus, the devil fights against man because of riches.

Wherefore, Augustine says, *De civitate*,[[6]](#endnote-6) one of the Romans who had been consul twice, was driven out of the consulate and it was because he was found to have ten pounds of silver in vases. From this it is evident how the Romans valued the wealth of persons. Indeed they judged it perilous and this is accordingly why silver is not to be loved, because it is not in aid of freedom which is evident from this, because it is lacking in a greater necessity, Ezech. 7[:9]: “Their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath.” Rather which is worse, it will be in witness of their just damnation, James 5[:3]: “Your gold and silver is cankered: and the rust of them shall be for a testimony against you.”

¶ Secondly, silver spiritually accepted is said to be eloquence, concerning which Prov. 10[:20]: “The tongue of the just is as choice silver.” For, when eloquence serves justice, it is commendable. Indeed, when it is unjust it is blameworthy. Wherefore such eloquence is called false silver, 3 Kings 10[:21]: “There was no silver, nor was any account made of it in the days of Solomon,” who reigned peacefully.

Wherefore, for the peace of the church, Bernard wrote *Ad Eugenium papa de consideracione,* book one,[[7]](#endnote-7) let the causes be pleaded, but just as it ought to be. The varied practice, which is prevalent among you, is most execrable; and as such, does not become the Church, but it does not even become the forum. It is a marvel to me how your religious ears can bear to listen to the disputes of advocates of this class, and to their battles of words, which avail more to the subversion of the truth than to its discovery. Correct the corrupt custom, cut off the tongues that speak vanity, which are eloquent, as they fight against [the truth]. In truth concerning which, Prov. 26[:23]: “Swelling lips joined with a corrupt heart, are like an earthen vessel adorned with silver dross.” Therefore Salomon warns, Prov. 16[:16]: “Get wisdom, because it is better than silver.” For just as mud so silver is valued. In view of that, the columns of the tabernacles were made by Moses, they had to be clothed in silver, Exod. 27[:17]. Because the teachers in the Church ought to be resounding in preaching and teaching, wherefore, Can. 3[:10]: “The pillars thereof he made of silver,” concerning which Gregory says,[[8]](#endnote-8) God gave preachers to the Church who support it by examples, he has strengthened it by a great straightness of justice, and so that they might educate with their preaching, he has decorated them with a brightness of eloquence, as if with splendor of silver.

1. John Peckham, *Registrum Epistolarum* Preface ed. Charles Trice Martin (London: Longman, 1885), (3:lxxxix): Argentum congrue interpretatur, quasi ardor gentium. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* 18.110 (1590, p. 480a): Et quando capitur peluis ardentem aspectu excecatur, catenis colligatur ludere compellitur et per verbera domesticatur.

When he is taken he is made blind with a bright basin, and bound with chains, and compelled to play, and tamed with beating.

Cf. *Tallinna Linnaarhiivi (f.230) “Tractatus moralis de oculo”* (f. 268v), ed. by Meelis Friedenthal (Dissertationes Theologiae Universitatis Tartuensis, 13) (Kirjastus: Tartu Ülikooli, 2008), p. 164: Argentum enim interpretatur ardor gencium sicut enim ursus excecatur per peluim sic cupidus dum intencionis oculum ad fulgarem auri conuertit et delectatur in ipso ad modum vrsi spiritualiter excecatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives,* The Life of Lycurgus [of Sparta], 9.1, (LCL 046:230): Next, he undertook to divide up their movable property also, in order that every vestige of unevenness and inequality might be removed; and when he saw that they could not bear to have it taken from them directly, he took another course, and overcame their avarice by political devices. In the first place, he withdrew all gold and silver money from currency, and ordained the use of iron money only. Then to a great weight and mass of this he gave a trifling value, so that ten minas' worth required a large store-room in the house, and a yoke of cattle to transport it. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Coluccio Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis* 4.2.1: Et primo quidem iuxta veritatis testimonium, hoc est: Christiani dogmatis instituta, consonum esse videtur infernum ascribi circa centrum in concavo spere terre. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Jerome, *Commentarium in Evangelium Matthae* 1 (10:9-10) (PL 26.62): Nam si habuissent aurum et argentum, videbantur non causa salutis hominum, sed causa lucri praedicare. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.18.2 (PL 41.164): Nam illud quod rem publicam, id est rem populi, rem patriae, rem communem, cum haberent opulentissimam atque ditissimam, sic ipsi in suis domibus pauperes erant, ut quidam eorum, qui jam bis consul fuisset, ex illo senatu pauperum hominum pelleretur notatione censoria, quod decem pondo argenti in vasis habere compertus est. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, 1.10.13 (PL 182.740): Agitentur causae, sed sicut oportet. Nam is modus, qui frequentatur, exsecrabilis plane; et qui, non dico Ecclesiam, sed nec forum deceat [al. deceret]. Miror namque quemadmodum religiosae aures tuae audire sustinent hujusmodi disputationes advocatorum, et pugnas verborum, quae magis ad subversionem, quam ad inventionem proficiunt veritatis. Corrige pravum morem, et praecide linguas vaniloquas [al. maliloquas], et labia dolosa claude. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Gregory, *Super Cantica Canticorum expositio* 3.10 (PL 79.506): Christus sanctam Ecclesiam de sanctis in aeternum permansuris construxit. Columnas ejus fecit argenteas, quia eidem Ecclesiae praedicatores dedit, qui et ut eam exemplis sustentarent, magna justitiae rectitudine roboravit, et ut praedicationibus erudirent, nitore eloquii, quasi splendore argenti, decoravit. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)