



## Philosophical and ethical dimension of death in Ambrose of Mediolanus' *De Bono Mortis*: Defining death as a good

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**Abstract.** The study aimed to analyse the interpretation of death as a moral and spiritual phenomenon that has a positive meaning for a believer. The study analysed the definition of death as a moral and spiritual phenomenon in early Christian theology, in particular through the teachings of Ambrose of Mediolanus. The study analysed the theological, philosophical and ethical aspects of the understanding of death in the Christian tradition, traces their connection with ancient philosophical doctrines, especially Stoicism and Neoplatonism, and compares them with modern bioethical concepts. The moral aspect of death as a means of purification, spiritual perfection and transition to eternal existence was addressed. The study determined that Ambrose of Mediolanus viewed death not only as an inevitable biological process but also as a necessary condition for the liberation of the soul from bodily passions and approach to God. One of the main conclusions was that the concept of death in the Christian tradition differs from secular and philosophical approaches in that it is defined not as the end of existence, but as a transition to true being. Ambrose emphasised that fear of death is a consequence of insufficient faith and moral immaturity and that proper spiritual preparation highlights it as a good. The study determined that such interpretation of death as a means of purification and return to God has parallels with Neoplatonic ideas about the soul, which must be freed from the material world to achieve a higher reality. The analysis of the historical context has shown that the concept of death in early Christian theology was formed at the intersection of ancient philosophical traditions and biblical ideas about life after death. The practical significance of the results obtained lies in the possibility of applying the concept of death developed by Ambrose in modern theological, philosophical and ethical discourse

**Keywords:** christianity; theology; eschatology; stoicism; asceticism; Neoplatonic ideas; morality

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## Introduction

The problem of death and its understanding in the Christian tradition is one of the central themes of religious philosophy and theology. Death is traditionally seen not only as the biological end of human existence but also as a metaphysical transition to eternity. The study of this problem is relevant as it defines the main anthropological, ethical and spiritual aspects of human existence that determine the perception of death in different historical epochs. One of the most important theological texts analysing death as a phenomenon is the treatise *De Bono Mortis* by St. Ambrose of Mediolanus, in which death is interpreted as a good necessary for achieving eternal life. In the modern academic tradition, considerable attention is paid to the study of the understanding of death in Western Christianity (Mediolanus, 1509). M. Dolz (2023) studied the changing conceptions of death in different historical periods, emphasising the role of religious and philosophical concepts in shaping attitudes to this phenomenon. The analysis covered both medieval theological texts and contemporary discourses, which demonstrates the continuity of theological ideas related to death. The study highlighted the relationship between the Christian tradition and its perception of death in the context of moral improvement, which echoes the works of St. Ambrose. A similar approach was demonstrated by F. Ioanidis (2013), who examined the evolution of ideas about death in medieval Western Christianity, especially emphasising the importance of works such as *De Bono Mortis*. The study determined that death in the Christian worldview acquired not only eschatological significance but also became a means of moral improvement. According to the conclusions, the concept of death in the theological tradition combined fear of the unknown with hope for eternal life, which is significantly different from secular philosophical approaches. The researcher also emphasised that reflections on death in the Christian tradition contributed to the development of asceticism and preparation for a dignified death.

The problem of the relation between God's goodness and death as part of human existence was considered by C. Hartin (2022), highlighting the tension between the idea of death as a consequence of the fall and its definition as an act that allows a person to achieve unity with God. The study demonstrated that the theological tradition recognises death not only as a punishment but also as a path to purification, emphasising its role in Christian spiritual development. The author also analysed how theological thought has changed over the centuries, moving from the perception of death as a tragedy to its understanding in terms of grace and salvation. Similarly, H. Hwang (2021) analysed St. Ambrose's treatise *De Bono Mortis*, addressing the interpretation of death in the context of Christian eschatology and moral preparation for it. The researcher argued that St. Ambrose's teaching not only explains death as a transition to eternal life but also forms a specific moral imperative for believers. The study emphasised that St. Ambrose viewed death not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a test that must be passed through righteous living and asceticism, which echoes Neoplatonic ideas about the purification of the soul.

S. Frittola (2021) investigated the relationship between human dignity and the meaning of death in the Christian tradition, analysing the concepts derived from the treatise of St. Ambrose. The study determined that *De Bono Mortis* was central in shaping medieval ideas about moral preparation for death and an ascetic lifestyle as a means of spiritual purification. The study emphasised that for St. Ambrose, death was not just the end of earthly existence, but an act of transition that should be accompanied by inner improvement and self-denial. The role of asceticism in preparing for death, which echoes the traditions of Eastern Christianity, was emphasised.

P. Moretti (2020) conducted a textual analysis of medieval manuscripts of *De Bono Mortis*, identifying the peculiarities of the transmission of this treatise in the Latin tradition. The study revealed

various variants of the text, which allows for a deeper understanding of its reception in the early Middle Ages. The differences in the Latin manuscripts revealed indicate that the treatise was adapted to the theological and cultural realities of different eras. Lastly, E. Gannaway (2012) examined the visual and symbolic aspects of death in St. Ambrose's work, in particular, how Ambrose used the image of the tomb as a place for the soul's passage to eternity. The study demonstrated that for St. Ambrose, the grave was not a symbol of the end, but rather a threshold to a new existence, which echoes the early Christian tradition of perceiving death as the beginning of heavenly life.

One of the important areas of research is the definition of the anthropological doctrine of the Christian tradition, particularly the views of the Church Fathers on humans as the image of God. B. Czyzewski (2020) analysed the theological interpretations of the concept of "image" in the context of human creation, based on the works of St. Basil the Great and St. Ambrose. The study emphasised that for both thinkers, the "image" was not a static concept but had a dynamic nature: it implied spiritual development, moral growth, and constant likeness to God. B. Czyzewski (2020) emphasises that for St. Ambrose, human corporeality does not contradict godhood but rather points to the need to overcome the corporeal through the spiritual. Despite a considerable amount of research, the contemporary academic literature still lacks a detailed analysis of the relationship between the theological ideas of St. Ambrose and modern conceptions of death in philosophy and bioethics. The study conducted in this paper allows an expanded definition of death in the context of not only medieval Christian theology but also modern philosophical thought. It also fills in the gaps in the study of the influence of Neoplatonism and ancient philosophy on the formation of Christian discourse on death.

The study aimed to examine the understanding of death as a moral and spiritual phenomenon, interpreted as a necessary and meaningful stage of Christian existence, in the context of St.

Ambrose's theological thought. To achieve this goal, the following research tasks were set: to reveal the philosophical and ethical justification of death as a good in the Christian tradition through the analysis of theological and moral concepts formed in patristic thought, in particular in *De Bono Mortis* by Ambrose of Milan; to evaluate the socio-cultural context of the understanding of death in the era of St. Ambrose, comparing it with pagan and Christian ideas about death, as well as to investigate the influence of ancient philosophy, in particular Neoplatonism, on the teachings; to determine the significance of St. Ambrose's concept of death for contemporary philosophical discourse, especially in the context of bioethics and the moral aspects of the end of life, in particular the problem of a dignified death.

## Materials and Methods

The study was based on an interdisciplinary analysis, which included the study of Christian eschatology, moral and ethical aspects of death, its socio-cultural context and philosophical interpretations. The methodological basis of the study was the historical and philosophical analysis, comparative method, comparative analysis and hermeneutical approach. The historical and philosophical analysis was used to trace the development of the concept of death in early Christian thought and to identify its relationship with previous philosophical traditions. The comparative method was used to compare St. Ambrose's views with the Neoplatonic and Stoic traditions, as well as to compare such concept of death with modern philosophical and bioethical approaches. A comparative analysis of approaches to the interpretation of death was used to compare the concept of death in *De Bono Mortis* with other theological, philosophical and ethical traditions. The hermeneutical approach was used to interpret the biblical references in the treatise and their significance in St. Ambrose's theological argumentation.

The study was based on a wide range of sources, including modern editions of the *De Bono Mortis* treatise, biblical passages, monographs,

scholarly articles, and materials related to Christian eschatology, death ethics, and the Neoplatonic tradition. Contemporary research on bioethics, the problem of a dignified death, and historical transformations of ideas about death were addressed. To achieve the research goal, several main stages were conducted. The first stage involved an analysis of the theological and philosophical concepts of death in the Christian tradition, which determined how the understanding of death as a good was formed. The views of early Christian thinkers, in particular Augustine, St. Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa, as well as Neoplatonic sources that influenced Christian theology, were studied. In the next stage, the moral and ethical aspect of death in the teachings of St. Ambrose was studied, including an analysis of attitude to the passions of the body, the meaning of death as the end of earthly existence and its connection with the Neoplatonic tradition. The study of the ethical dimension of death in the context of early Christian asceticism, in particular, how St. Ambrose interpreted the renunciation of material goods and bodily pleasures as a form of preparation for death, was highlighted. Subsequently, the study of the socio-cultural context of the understanding of death in the time of St. Ambrose was conducted. The study also analysed how pagan and Christian ideas about death coexisted in late antique society and how the Christian definition of death gradually replaced the traditional Roman ideas about the afterlife. For this purpose, the ideas of Roman stoic philosophers such as Seneca and M. Aurelius, traced the parallels between the Stoic perception of death as a natural phenomenon and the views of St. Ambrose. The next stage of the study focused on comparing different approaches to understanding death in theological, philosophical and ethical traditions. The conceptual differences between Christian, existentialist and modern ethical interpretations of death were analysed.

At the final stage of the study, the significance of St. Ambrose's ideas for contemporary philosophical discourse was analysed, in the

context of bioethics, euthanasia and issues of dignified death. The theological tradition of understanding death as the natural end of life was compared with modern approaches to palliative care and ethical discussions on ending suffering. Emphasis was devoted to comparison of the Christian tradition with the concepts of contemporary death researchers who view death through the prism of positive psychology, socio-cultural transformations and the phenomenological approach.

## Results and Discussion

### **Philosophical and ethical justification of death as a good in the Christian tradition**

In the Christian tradition, death is not defined as an end, but as a transition to a new stage of existence that opens in the light of Christ's Resurrection. This definition was formed in patristic thought and is reflected in the writings of the Church Fathers, including St. Ambrose, Augustine, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa. In the patristic tradition, death is perceived as a consequence of the fall, but also as a means of liberation from sin and return to God. Saint Basil the Great emphasised that death was not part of God's original plan but became a reality due to man's apostasy from God (Rousseau, 1998). The need to prepare for death through a pious life, considering the "science of dying complacently" to be the highest science for a Christian, was emphasised. Gregory of Nyssa viewed death as a temporary separation of the soul and body, which is a necessary stage for achieving eternal life (Farrugia, 2024). Gregory believed that through death, a person is freed from bodily limitations and gains the opportunity for full communion with God. Gregory emphasised that death is not evil, but rather a transition to true existence, where the soul can achieve deification. Aurelius Augustine also interpreted death as a consequence of original sin but saw it as an opportunity for purification and preparation for eternal life (Hegedűs, 2020). Aurelius argued that through death, a person gets rid of the sinful nature and

gets a chance to be restored in God. Augustine emphasised the importance of remembering death as an incentive for moral improvement and spiritual growth.

Ambrose of Mediolanus (Latin: *Ambrosius Mediolanensis*; c. 340 – 4 April 397) is one of the most influential Church Fathers, a Christian theologian, bishop of Mediolanus (modern Milan), church reformer, and one of the four Western Church Teachers (Villazala, 2024). Known as one of the main fighters against Arianism, Ambrose fought for the establishment of Christian orthodoxy, which was important in the context of religious conflicts in the fourth century. In the *De Bono Mortis*, Ambrose of Mediolanus considers death as a good for the believer. Ambrose emphasised that death frees a person from the suffering and temptations of earthly life, opening the way to eternal bliss with God. St. Ambrose

emphasised that fear of death is a consequence of insufficient faith and understanding of God's plan. In the context of Christian eschatology, St. Ambrose's work is important because it offers a positive perception of death as a necessary step on the path to salvation. Ambrose urged believers not to be afraid of death, but to perceive it as a transition to a better life, free from suffering and sin (Pakowski, 2023). This approach contributed to the formation of a Christian attitude to death as a natural and good phenomenon that corresponds to God's providence.

### The concept of death in the *De Bono Mortis*

In the treatise *De Bono Mortis*, death is presented as a good that contributes to the attainment of higher spiritual perfection. Ambrose of Mediolanus formulates several key arguments in favour of this understanding (Table 1).

**Table 1.** St. Ambrose's main arguments about the positive meaning of death

No.	Argument	The essence of the explanation	Biblical references
1	Eliminating suffering	Death frees a person from the trials of earthly life	Weeping and mourning cease (Bible)
2	Returning to God	The soul returns to its divine source	Ecclesiastes 12
3	The condition of resurrection	Without death, there is no transition to eternal life	1 Corinthians 15
4	Purification of the soul	Liberation from earthly passions and sins	Ideas of Neoplatonism (Image, 2020)
5	God's grace	Death is not only a consequence of the fall but also a way to salvation	Theological interpretations

**Source:** compiled by the author

First, death eliminates earthly trials and suffering. The text repeatedly emphasises that life is accompanied by numerous physical and moral trials: illness, temptation, and the fall. Death is believed to be how the believer is freed from these burdens. St. Ambrose appeals to the biblical notion of "weeping and mourning" as inherent elements of earthly existence that cease after the transition to eternal life. Second, death is a return to God. It is not seen as a cessation of existence but as the return of the soul to its source, i.e., to the Creator.

Analysing the theological basis for this argument, St. Ambrose refers to Ecclesiastes 12 (n.d.), which reads: "And the dust shall return to the ground as it was, and the spirit shall return to the God who gave it". Thus, death is not only not the end but also becomes a renewal, a return to the original purity. Thirdly, death is a condition for resurrection. St. Ambrose emphasises that resurrection is possible only through death. In the light of Christian eschatology, death is a necessary stage in transition from bodily to spiritual existence. The Apostle

Paul's idea that "if there is no death, there is no resurrection" (1 Corinthians 15, n.d.) comes to mind. Finally, death contributes to the purification of the soul. Bodily existence is accompanied by passions that alienate man from God. *De Bono Mortis* states that death is a way of getting rid of earthly temptations, which helps prepare for the acceptance of eternal bliss. This aspect is related to the Neoplatonic notion of the soul's separation from the material world to return to the divine (Jones, 2020).

In *De Bono Mortis*, death is presented as a phenomenon with a double meaning: on the one hand, it is a consequence of original sin, and on the other hand, it is an instrument of God's providence leading to salvation. St. Ambrose adhered to the traditional Christian understanding of death as a punishment for the fall of Adam and Eve. Ambrose relied on the text of Genesis 3 (n.d.): "To dust you shall return", emphasising that mortality is an inevitable consequence of human sinfulness. However, this mortality, in my opinion, is not an absolute evil, because it also serves as a purification. The development of thought leads to the consideration of death as a path to salvation. Through Christ, death loses its tragic meaning and becomes a transition to eternal life. The text draws parallels between the death of the first man and the death of Christ: if death came into the world through the fall of Adam, it lost its power through the death of Christ (Evans, 2002). Thus, Christ's sacrifice is the key to victory over death.

An important aspect of the concept is the idea of spiritual death as necessary for true life. St. Ambrose echoed the thought of the Apostle Paul: "To live to God, we must die to the world" (Romans 6, n.d.). This means that physical death is only a symbolic reflection of the inner rebirth that takes place in a righteous person. In this context, death takes on a pedagogical significance as it is a means of educating the believer. Expecting death, a person should prepare for it through moral self-improvement, good deeds, and purification from passions (Khodanych, 2023). The treatise emphasises that only those who have lived righteously can face death without fear

and even with joy, looking forward to meeting God (Wiesner, 1970). Although *De Bono Mortis* is written in the context of Christian thought, it demonstrates the influence of ancient philosophy, in particular Stoicism and Neoplatonism. The Stoic tradition influenced the perception of death as a natural process that should not cause fear. Stoics, such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, emphasised that death is part of the St. Ambrose order of being and should be accepted calmly and without despair (Ferraiolo, 2019). St. Ambrose used this idea to explain that death is not something terrible, but only a transition to a new state of existence. Another Stoic concept reflected in *De Bono Mortis* is the idea of inner freedom from the fear of death. For the Stoics, death is not evil, but evil is man's dependence on earthly passions (Scherz, 2017). Similarly, St. Ambrose believed that a Christian should not be afraid of death, because it is only liberation from the corporeal world.

The influence of Neoplatonism is manifested in the interpretation of death as the return of the soul to God. St. Ambrose accepts the idea that the material world is only a temporary stage of existence, while true existence is in the spiritual world. In this, Ambrose uses the Neoplatonic concept of the hierarchy of being, according to which the soul, after leaving the body, returns to its divine source (Drecoll, 2024). Neoplatonic influence can also be traced in the understanding of death as a necessary condition for merging with the absolute.

### **The moral and ethical aspect of death in the teachings of St. Ambrose**

In the interpretation of death, Ambrose of Mediolanus viewed it not only as a natural phenomenon or a necessary stage of transition to eternity but also as an act of moral purification (Mediolanus, 1509). Death, following Ambrose, is the moment of the final distinction between the temporal and the eternal, the sinful and the holy. In this sense, it is a spiritual test that a person must go through to achieve unity with God. The main moral requirement that St. Ambrose put

forward to Christians regarding death is the need to prepare for it through righteous living (Frittola, 2021). *De Bono Mortis* emphasises that death should not be perceived as a sudden cessation of existence but should be seen as the final stage that summarises all human life activities. Life is full of temptations and trials, and only those who have lived it following Christian virtues can look forward to death with hope and without fear.

The purifying function of death was viewed by St. Ambrose through the prism of its connection with spiritual renewal. It is the moment of final liberation from all the impurities that have accumulated in a person during earthly existence. This correlates with the Christian notion of death as a transitional state in which the soul is freed from bodily limitations and sinful inclinations and can enter the Kingdom of God. The condition for such purification is an appropriate life: observance of God's commandments, avoidance of sin, and spiritual discipline. Without this, according to St. Ambrose, death can become not a purification, but rather a moment of final separation from God (Vannier, 2017). A person who has lived a life of sinfulness and indifference to spiritual improvement will not be able to find the path to salvation after death. *De Bono Mortis* contains reflections on the need to remember death as a factor of moral improvement. The constant awareness that death is inevitable helps a person to be more focused on the spiritual life and less attached to earthly goods. This correlates with the Gospel call to "watch", to be ready for the moment of transition to eternity (Matthew 24, n.d.).

One of the central themes in St. Ambrose's teaching on death is the dichotomy of body and soul. *De Bono Mortis* emphasises the fundamental opposition between the corporeal and the spiritual, which has deep roots in the ancient philosophical tradition (Lévy, 2021). The body, according to St. Ambrose, is temporary, mortal and subject to sin, while the soul is immortal and called to union with God. This antithesis becomes the basis for explaining death as a good act of liberation from bodily limitations and temptations.

As long as a person lives in the body, struggles with desires, passions, and bodily needs that can separate from God is forced upon life. Death is the moment of final separation from the material world and the transition to a state where the soul is no longer burdened by bodily defects. The issue of bodily passions was addressed substantially. St. Ambrose believed that in earthly life, a person often succumbs to temptations that are born in the body: the desire for pleasure, the desire for power, pride, and the thirst for wealth. These passions are an obstacle to spiritual development and death, according to *De Bono Mortis*, frees the soul from their influence. However, for this process of liberation to be beneficial, it is necessary to learn to control passions while mortal. The work emphasises that death only completes this process, but a person must begin it while still alive through self-discipline, prayer, good deeds, and asceticism (Harmon, 2017). Otherwise, even after death, the soul will not be able to achieve true purification but will remain bound to its earthly sins.

In the context of the moral and ethical understanding of death, St. Ambrose emphasised the need for an ascetic way of life as a preparation for a dignified death. In this aspect, the teaching is close to the positions of the desert fathers, who saw asceticism not just to avoid sins, but as a method of gradual liberation from the earthly for the sake of approaching God (Lemeni, 2020). Asceticism is seen not only as a restriction in food, material goods, or social contacts but also as a spiritual practice that helps to develop inner freedom. The rejection of excessive pleasures and bodily aspirations is a form of voluntary "dying" to the world, which prepares the soul for the final transition to eternity. Contemplative life in the context of *De Bono Mortis* plays an important role in preparing for death. St. Ambrose insisted on the need for constant reflection on the temporality of human existence and the inevitability of death. This contemplation should not generate fear, but, on the contrary, strengthen faith and help a person to live in such a way that the transition to eternity is not a tragedy, but an expected moment

of meeting God. The work emphasises that an ascetic and contemplative way of life contributes to a calm attitude towards death, as a person who achieved freedom from material attachments during life does not feel fear of losing them.

### **The socio-cultural context of the understanding of death in the Age of St. Ambrose**

In late antiquity, Roman society was characterised by a complex combination of traditional pagan beliefs and new religious movements, including Christianity. Views on death at this time reflected both the heritage of ancient philosophy and the influence of new spiritual searches. In Roman society of late antiquity, death was perceived through the prism of philosophical and religious ideas. Stoicism, one of the leading philosophical schools of the time, viewed death as a natural and inevitable process that should not cause fear. The Stoics believed that death was part of the cosmic order, and a wise person should accept it calmly as the end of the life cycle. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor and stoic philosopher, emphasised in *Meditations* that death is not evil, but only a transition to another state of being (Robertson, 2024).

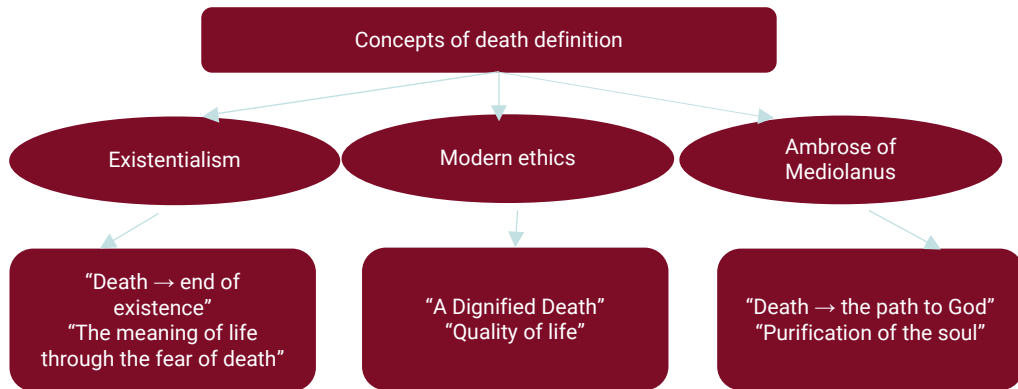
Epicureanism, another influential philosophical movement, also offered its understanding of death. Epicurus argued that death should not be a concern for humans because as long as a mortal vessel exists, there is no death, and when it comes, the vessel is gone (Willaschek, 2023). Thus, the fear of death is unfounded, and one should focus on achieving happiness in life. However, along with philosophical approaches, there were also traditional pagan beliefs that perceived death as a transition to the afterlife, where the soul continues to exist. The Romans believed in an underworld where the souls of the dead receive rewards or punishments depending on their actions during life (King, 2020). These ideas influenced funeral rites and attitudes towards the dead in society.

*De Bono Mortis*, Ambrose of Mediolanus offers a Christian definition of death that differs

from the pagan and philosophical concepts of the time. Ambrose views death not as an end or a transition to the underworld, but as a good that opens the way to eternal life with God. St. Ambrose polemicised against pagan ideas about death, denying the fear of it. Ambrose argued that for a Christian, death is a deliverance from earthly worries and suffering, an opportunity to unite with God. This contrasts with the pagan fear of the unknown after death and the philosophical desire for apathy. In addition, St. Ambrose emphasised the moral aspect of death, stressing the need to prepare for it through a righteous life. Ambrose urged Christians not to fear death, but to perceive it as a transition to a better being, which is consistent with the Christian belief in resurrection and eternal life. *De Bono Mortis* had a significant impact on the formation of medieval Christian thought about death (Mediolanus, 1509). The interpretation of death as a good and a transition to eternal life became the basis for many medieval theologians and philosophers. In medieval culture, the theme of death was central, reflected in literature, art, and philosophy. The concept of “memento mori” became an important motif that underlined the transience of life and the need for spiritual preparation for death (Subhan, 2023). This reflected St. Ambrose’s ideas about death as a purification and a path to God. In addition, these teachings influenced the development of ascetic practices in medieval monasticism. The desire for freedom from bodily passions and emphasis on the spiritual life, which St. Ambrose wrote about, became the basis for monastic orders that saw asceticism as preparation for death and union with God.

### **The significance of St. Ambrose’s ideas for contemporary philosophical discourse**

The ideas of St. Ambrose, as outlined in *De Bono Mortis*, continue to have a significant impact on contemporary philosophical discourse, especially in the context of ethical concepts of death, the meaning of life, theological thought, and bioethical issues such as euthanasia (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Comparison of approaches to death

**Source:** compiled by the author based on J. Derrida (2020)

In contemporary philosophy, there are different approaches to understanding death and the meaning of life. Existentialism, for example, views death as the ultimate point of existence, which gives life authenticity and encourages the search for individual meaning. M. Heidegger emphasised that the awareness of mortality is the key to the comprehension of true existence (Blattner, 2023). In this context, death acts as a factor that stimulates personal development and self-determination. St. Ambrose, in turn, interpreted death as a good that frees the soul from bodily limitations and opens the way to unity with God. This understanding differs from the existentialist approach, as it focuses not on the individual meaning of life, but on the transcendent goal of achieving divine existence. Thus, for St. Ambrose, death is not only the end of the earthly journey but also the beginning of eternal life in the presence of God. Contemporary ethics also addresses the issues of quality of life and dignity of death. The concept of “dying with dignity” implies a person’s right to die without pain and suffering, which is sometimes linked to the issue of euthanasia (Morgan & Gazarian, 2023). St. Ambrose, although not considering euthanasia in the modern sense, emphasised the importance of preparing for death through moral and spiritual purification, which can be interpreted as a desire for a dignified death in the spiritual sense.

Contemporary bioethics faces several complex issues, among which euthanasia occupies a special place. Discussions about the right to die, patient autonomy and the ethics of ending life are highly controversial in society, as well as in medical and theological circles. Rethinking *De Bono Mortis* in this context can provide valuable perspectives. St. Ambrose saw death as a good thing but in the context of the natural end of life and the transition to eternity. Ambrose emphasised the importance of moral and spiritual preparation for death, which includes acceptance of suffering as part of being human. This approach can be useful in contemporary debates about euthanasia, emphasising the importance of palliative care, spiritual support and preserving the patient’s dignity until the natural end of life. However, it is worth noting that the direct application of St. Ambrose’s teachings to contemporary bioethical issues has its limitations. The conception of death as good is based on theological premises that may not always be acceptable in a secular society. Therefore, it is important to consider the cultural and historical context of writings when applying them to contemporary ethical debates. The study has established that death in the Christian tradition is seen as a good thing that contributes to spiritual purification and preparation for eternal life. This interpretation is consistent with patristic sources, in particular the writings of

St. Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and St. Basil the Great. They emphasised that death is the means of liberation from sin and return to God.

Consideration of this problem was also presented in modern Christian ethics, where the approach to death remains a key issue. A. Ride-nour (2017) analysed the meaning of death in the context of Christian medical ethics, comparing it with the views of Augustine and Barth. Ambrose argued that death should not be perceived solely as a physical end, but rather as part of God's work, which allows a person to achieve spiritual renewal. This correlates with the ideas of St. Ambrose, who viewed death not as a tragedy but as a good that leads to salvation and liberation from earthly passions. However, while traditional theology emphasises the purifying and salvific nature of death, modern bioethics draws attention to its moral and medical aspects, particularly the dignity of a person in the process of dying, palliative care and the issue of patient autonomy. Thus, contemporary discussions about death require a combination of spiritual reflection and practical issues of end-of-life care. St. In the treatise *De Bono Mortis*, Ambrose argued that death is not only natural but also necessary for achieving eternal life. Ambrose linked death to the purification of the soul and the break with bodily passions, emphasising that only through death is the fullness of spiritual renewal and union with God possible (Mediolanus, 1509). A similar interpretation could be traced in the Neoplatonic texts that influenced Christian thought, especially in the views on the separation of the soul from the material world. In this context, S. Napier (2014) referred to the ancient interpretation of death as "good" when analysing St. Ambrose's position on euthanasia. The study emphasised that St. Ambrose did not perceive voluntary death as morally permissible, as Ambrose considered it an interference with God's plan. However, in contrast to the Stoic tradition, which permitted suicide for the sake of honour, St. Ambrose viewed death as an act that should take place at a time determined by God. In this aspect, the analysis differs from modern approaches that

interpret euthanasia as a means of avoiding suffering and ensuring a dignified end to life. At the same time, the doctrine leaves room for a moral understanding of death in the context of contemporary bioethics and theological anthropology. The study revealed that death in St. Ambrose's work has a twofold meaning: on the one hand, it is a consequence of original sin, and on the other hand, it is a condition for the transition to salvation. This approach is based on the Christian doctrine of the necessity of death to overcome the consequences of the fall and restore harmony between God and man. Death is not perceived as the final point of existence, but as a door that opens the way to resurrection and eternal life. This approach differs significantly from secularised conceptions of death, which reject its religious interpretation, emphasising its biological or existential aspect. S. Nadler (2020) examined the problem of death through the prism of Spinoza's ethics, where it is interpreted not as a good, but as the end of the life cycle, which has no metaphysical meaning. Spinoza denied the need for fear of death, as Ambrose considered it a natural part of being that does not require spiritual reflection. In this context, St. Ambrose's approach is fundamentally different, insisting that death is not the end, but the moment of union with God. While Spinoza called for not worrying about death and focusing on life, St. Ambrose emphasised that preparation for death is a key aspect of Christian existence, as it determines the soul's further path in eternity.

The problem of death and moral preparation for it was one of the key aspects of the study. It was found that St. Ambrose paid special attention to the ascetic way of life as a way of preparing for death, emphasising the need for spiritual purification and gradual liberation from bodily passions. Ambrose viewed death not as an accidental event but as an inevitable stage on the path to salvation, requiring appropriate internal preparation. In this context, asceticism was seen not only as self-denial but also as a method of forming a correct Christian attitude in the face of the inevitability of death. A similar aspect was considered by

F. Svenaeus (2020) in a study on the phenomenology of suffering and the ethics of end-of-life. The study emphasised that modern society is trying to deny the naturalness of death, pushing it out of consciousness, while historically it was seen as an integral part of human experience. The phenomenological approach focuses on the personal perception of death, which echoes the concept of St. Ambrose, for whom death was not only a physical but also a spiritual transition. While the phenomenology of death views it as an individual event that shapes a person's self-awareness, St. Ambrose emphasised its metaphysical significance, stressing that a correct perception of death is possible only in the light of Christian doctrine.

A separate aspect of the research was the study of the influence of ancient philosophy on theological ideas about death. The study determined that St. Ambrose's teaching on the purification of the soul through death partially echoes Neoplatonic ideas about the gradual liberation from the material world and the return of the soul to its divine source. St. Ambrose adapted these concepts to the Christian context, viewing death not only as a necessary condition for spiritual renewal but also as a manifestation of God's mercy. In this context, L. Marchese (2025) analysed the notion of death in biophilia, highlighting the relationship between the literary depiction of death and real cultural ideas. The study argued that the religious discourse of death is preserved in contemporary literature, although it acquires new interpretations related to modern ideas about corporeality, memory, and the transience of being. The similarity to St. Ambrose's concept is that death continues to be not only a physical phenomenon but also a symbolic transition to another state of existence that has moral and spiritual significance. Another aspect of the study was the significance of St. Ambrose's ideas for contemporary philosophical discourse, in the context of bioethics and the question of the dignity of death. It was found that in the theological tradition, death is seen as a natural stage of human existence that should not cause fear but rather be perceived as part of God's plan.

Instead, modern bioethics focuses on euthanasia, palliative care, and the human right to a dignified death. H. Phan *et al.* (2020) investigated the issue of death education and its impact on positive psychology, emphasising that understanding mortality can contribute to the development of spirituality and ethical self-improvement. The study examines the integration of philosophical, religious and psychological aspects in educational programmes aimed at fostering an informed attitude towards death. The study determined that courses focusing on death helped students develop resilience in the face of existential crises, as well as improved emotional well-being and moral maturity. This resonates with St. Ambrose's concept of the need for moral preparation for death, which should be done through self-discipline and focus on eternal values rather than fear of death. Moreover, H. Phan *et al.* (2020) emphasised that the formation of a conscious attitude to death in the educational process contributes to the harmonisation of the spiritual and psychological state of the individual. In this aspect, their approach is similar to the theological ideas of St. Ambrose, who viewed death as a transition to a higher level of being and an opportunity for the soul to achieve full unity with God. The study also confirms that the inclusion of the topic of death in the education system has a positive impact on a person's attitude to the personal end of life, reducing anxiety, which is consistent with the Christian tradition of perceiving death not as death but as spiritual rebirth.

## Conclusions

The study has established that St. Ambrose's treatise *De Bono Mortis* reveals death as a necessary stage of spiritual development, which contributes to the purification of the soul and the transition to eternal life. The analysis of the text shows that St. Ambrose did not consider death solely as a consequence of original sin but saw it as an instrument of divine providence that allows a person to be freed from the perishable world and unite with God. Importantly, this concept has similarities with Neoplatonic thought, where death is

perceived as a return to the divine source. The results of the study confirmed that St. Ambrose offered not only a theological but also a moral and ethical understanding of death. Ambrose emphasised the need to prepare for death through a righteous life, asceticism and renunciation of bodily passions. This coincides with the Christian tradition of understanding death as a part of human existence, which has an educational character. In this aspect, this view correlates with phenomenological concepts, where death is perceived not as an end, but as a transcendent experience that shapes a person's self-awareness.

A comparative analysis of approaches to the understanding of death has shown that the theological tradition represented by St. Ambrose differs significantly from existentialist concepts that focus on the individual experience of death. Whereas existentialism views death as a defining moment of existence that shapes the meaning of life, the Christian understanding of death, as set out by St. Ambrose, is a transition to another form of existence that involves spiritual perfection and union with God. At the same time, the study showed that modern bioethical discussions on dying with dignity partially echo St. Ambrose's view of the need for moral and spiritual preparation for death. The socio-cultural context of the comprehension of death in the time of St. Ambrose testifies to the interaction of Christian and ancient traditions. The study established that in contrast to pagan notions of death as a transition to the realm of the dead, the Christian tradition reflected in *De Bono Mortis* considers death as the return of the soul to God. This is confirmed by the parallels with biblical texts, where death is not an absolute end, but only a change in the state of being.

The study has shown that in late antiquity there was a gradual transformation of views on death, through the establishment of Christian doctrine.

An analysis of modern approaches to understanding death in bioethics, philosophy and religious studies has revealed common and distinctive features with the ideas of St. Ambrose. Contemporary ethics actively discusses the issue of the dignity of death, which partially echoes the Ambrosean idea of moral preparation for death. At the same time, modern approaches, in contrast to theological concepts, emphasise the human right to choose the way of ending life, which is the subject of bioethical discussions on euthanasia. St. Ambrose's approach can be useful for research in religious ethics, the phenomenology of death, and the history of Christian thought. The analysis of the text – *De Bono Mortis* demonstrated how the Christian concept of death was formed and what elements of this tradition have survived to this day. Further research could focus on the influence of the concept of death developed by St. Ambrose on the theological thought of subsequent eras, as well as on its adaptation to various Christian traditions. Particularly promising is the analysis of how these ideas developed in medieval scholasticism, Orthodox theology, and modern ethical approaches to death and spiritual life.

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None.

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## Філософсько-етичний вимір смерті у творі Амвросія Медіоланського “*De Bono Mortis*”: осмислення смерті як блага

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**Анотація.** Мета роботи полягала в аналізі трактування смерті як морального і духовного явища, яке має позитивне значення для віруючої людини. У даній роботі проаналізовано осмислення смерті як морального та духовного феномену в ранньохристиянському богослов'ї, зокрема через вчення Амвросія Медіоланського. В процесі дослідження було проаналізовано богословські, філософські та етичні аспекти осмислення смерті в християнській традиції, простежено їхній зв'язок із античними філософськими вченнями, особливо стоїцизмом і неоплатонізмом, а також здійснено порівняння з сучасними біоетичними концепціями. Особлива увага була приділена моральному аспекту смерті як засобу очищення, духовного вдосконалення та переходу до вічного буття. У ході дослідження встановлено, що Амвросій Медіоланський розглядав смерть не лише як неминучий біологічний процес, а як необхідну умову звільнення душі від тілесних пристрастей та наближення до Бога. Одним з основних висновків стало те, що уявлення про смерть у християнській традиції відрізняється від світських та філософських підходів тим, що вона розглядається не як кінець існування, а як перехід до істинного буття. Амвросій підкреслював, що страх перед смертю є наслідком недостатньої віри та моральної незрілості, а правильна духовна підготовка дозволяє сприймати її як благо. Виявлено, що його трактування смерті як засобу очищення та повернення до Бога має паралелі з неоплатонічними уявленнями про душу, яка повинна звільнитися від матеріального світу для досягнення вищої реальності. Аналіз історичного контексту показав, що концепція смерті в ранньохристиянському богослов'ї була сформована на перетині античних філософських традицій і біблійних уявлень про життя після смерті. Практичне значення отриманих результатів полягає у можливості застосування концепції смерті, розробленої Амвросієм, у сучасному богословському, філософському та етичному дискурсі

**Ключові слова:** християнство; теологія; есхатологія; стоїцизм; аскетизм; неоплатонічні уявлення; мораль