THE CONCEPT OF "CONSCIENCE" AS AN ETHICAL CATEGORY

INTRODUCTION

Moral and ethical values are among the universal categories of the existence of a separate individual and society as a whole (RAKIMZHANOVA; RAKYMZHANOV, 2019). Understanding the place, role, and ways of expression and actualization of moral and ethical values is necessary for studying society and planning its future development. Information about the degree of readiness of society for certain changes can be found in the field of axiology. Therefore, we see the study of methods of moral and ethical concepts as relevant. The study of moral and ethical concepts should be carried out in a comprehensive manner using the methods of various humanitarian sciences and their directions, specifically ethics, philosophy, psychology, ethnology, history, and cultural studies (PROSKURIAKOV, 2020; DUDIN et al., 2019; MALIKOVA; MAKULBEKOV; IMANZHUSYP, 2019).

The modern specificity of axiosphere presents itself through the prism of eternal concepts ("conscience", "faith", "will", "truth"). Each of these concepts has a system of primary and secondary meanings characterized by broad associative connections, the ability to perform the cognitive acts of symbolization and personalization, and enhanced opportunities to be included in various contexts (APRESIAN; ARTEMEVA; PROKOFEV, 2018). The analysis of sources demonstrates that there are several works on the research problem in which their authors:

1. substantiate the consequences of a systematic study of the axiosphere accumulating centuries of human experience and presenting a powerful means of influencing individuals and society (MAKSIMOVA et al., 2018; KHALI, 2015; PETTEGREW, 2000; BELIAEVA, 2009; BAEVA, 2003);
2. interpret moral values as a mental phenomenon that reveals the features of thinking and behavioral stereotypes of a person (SELLING, 2017; FORSYTH; NYE, 1990; VAN DEN HEUVEL; NULLENS; ROOTHAAN, 2019).

However, we believe, there appears to be a lack of studies exploring the associative structure of the axiological concept of “conscience” in the biblical aspect. The present article aims to analyze the concept of “conscience” as an ethical category and create an associative model of the aforementioned concept in biblical and cultural discourse.

METHODS

The starting point for our study is formed by the following theoretical propositions. An “ethical concept” is a semantic unit that reflects the cultural ideas of society, its moral attitudes, and stereotypes and has a highly actualized element of value. Ethical concepts are characterized by a complex structural organization. Ethical concepts in general and the concept of “conscience” in particular are among the most ancient components of the axiosphere of Christian self-consciousness.
The concept of "conscience" as an ethical category

The main source used in the study is the text of the Bible (the Synodal translation) (BIBLIIA. SINODALNYI PEREVOD, n.d.). All quotations from the Holy Scriptures mentioned in the text of the article are taken from the indicated source. The method selected for the present study in the method of axiological space which directly focuses on modeling the structure of the concept of “conscience” on the corresponding systematization of the entire set of representations of the concept under study.

THE ESSENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF “CONSCIENCE”

Reality is comprehended through action and emotion. Human consciousness evaluates objects, phenomena, and processes in different aspects and according to different parameters - pragmatic, aesthetic, moral, and religious. The strategies for assessing the surrounding world are extremely diverse. A specific characteristic of the semantic representation of the world is that units of this level can embody the activity image of the world in signs-symbols ranging from national scenes and scenarios to the cultural activity of an ethnic group as a set of actions or procedures thus creating a world of prototypical (stereotypical) situations (ARUTIUNOVA, 2000).

The more complex the inner world of an individual is and the more diverse are their relationships with their environment, the higher is the level of moral self-awareness and the more developed are the sense of moral duty, self-control, and assessment of one’s actions. We put forward an assumption that conscience presents the ideal to which a person gravitates every time they are making a choice. In a certain sense, the entirety of spiritual and moral problematics of human existence as a whole begins with the fact that the development of culture puts a person before a choice the semantic foundations of which lay in the realm of spirituality. Realizing the freedom of choice, each of us chooses the path of life, as well as one or another system of value orientations (CESSARIO, 2009).

Conscience as personal property and spiritual value is the one most often used in communication between people and in assessing their relationships. This demonstrates that conscience presents the central essential characteristic of a person and an indicator of their versatile maturity (CROITORU; MUNTEANU, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the wide scientific and practical use of the concept of conscience, it, unfortunately, remains conceptually vague and is interpreted in different ways which directly affects its efficacy in transforming personality.

The concept of conscience was originally formulated in theology and philosophy since this concept presents an ethical category (Table 1).

Table 1. Understandings of conscience in theology and philosophy

| No. | Author, source | Understandings of conscience |
|-----|----------------|------------------------------|
| 1   | Martin Luther (1994, p. 82) | Conscience is the “religious foundation of man”, “the carrier of man’s relationship with God,” which significantly affects the mind. If the conscience is in a state of sin, the mind will be “darkened, perverted and flawed” |
| 2   | I. Ilin (1993, p. 179) | Conscience characterizes a person’s ability to execute moral self-control, independently formulate moral obligations for oneself, and demand oneself to fulfill them, make a self-assessment of the committed actions |
| 3   | Philosophical encyclopedic dictionary (IL'ICHEV et al., 1983, p. 620) | Moral self-control manifesting in the form of “a person’s awareness of the experience (“remorse”) of their relation to the moral norms of their social environment, of the whole society, the compliance of their actions with the requirements of these norms” |
| 4   | N.D. Arutiunova (2000, p. 57) | Conscience covers all layers of the human psyche from the lowest to the highest. It permeates the human "I" which forms an individual, irreplaceable, and unique personal property of a person. Thoughts, feelings, aspirations, as well as the most important life decisions, are born in it. Thus, conscience is the fundamental ability to determine moral action |
| 5   | L.S. Likhacheva (2019, p. 59) | The presence of conscience testifies to morality being rooted in the spiritual and emotional world of an individual |
| 6   | I.I. Kalnoi (2009, p. 59) | Conscience as one of the main features characterizing the essence (nature) of a person |

Source: Search data.

The concept of “conscience” represents not only a critical verdict, warning, or judgment but also certain evidence serving as the basis for the corresponding judgments, verdicts, and warnings made by a person.
The message that our inner voice gives one concerns about issues of good and evil, duty, and responsibility. Conscience appears as a mediator between a person and God.

Contact with God through ‘conscience’ is the most inner calling of the human spirit. Conscience becomes more active and promotes development when it appears as a partner when it turns into a space for dialogue between God and a person. Through it, a person hears the call of God and, at the same time, responds to this call positively or negatively. A call is always an invitation to complete communion with God; it is a meeting with the Creator who loves and calls for love in action. (MILTS, 1990, p. 278).

Thus, conscience presents certain gravitation towards what is common and universal for all mankind and means: 1) common knowledge, agreement; 2) consciousness, perfect knowledge, conviction; 3) doubt in how conscious a person’s choice is.

THE MENTAL AND AXIOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE CONCEPT OF “CONSCIENCE” IN THE BIBLE AND PEOPLE’S SELF-AWARENESS

Translations of the Bible from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin into European languages have played a huge role in shaping the meanings of the concept of “conscience” (CESSARIO, 2009). In the biblical sense, the foundation of the concept of “conscience” is formed by the following associations: “CONSCIENCE – God, Law of God, purity, kindness, soul, heart; resisting guile and evil; reproach”.

The mental and axiological content of the concept of “conscience” in the Bible is explored in Table 2.

### Table 2. The mental and axiological content of the concept of “conscience” in the Bible

| No. | CONSCIENCE       | Quote from the Bible                                                                 |
|-----|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | God              | “I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1). |
| 2   | Law of God       | “the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them” (Romans 2:15). |
| 3   | Purity           | “I give thanks to God, whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience” (2 Timothy 1:3). |
|     |                  | “To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15). |
| 4   | Kindness         | “having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:16). |
| 5   | Soul, heart      | “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience…” (Hebrews 10:22). |
| 6   | The antagonist of guile, evil | “in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” (1 Timothy 4:1). “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” (1 Timothy 4:2). |
| 7   | Reproach         | “But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.” (John 8:9). |
| 8   | Illness, weakness | “When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” (1 Corinthians 8:12). |

**Source:** Search data.

CONSCIENCE - GOD. In the consciousness of a Christian, conscience correlates with faith in God: “I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1). People are all created in the likeness of God and each person contains a particle of the infinite existence. A conscientious person seeks harmony with God and their own soul. Conscience embodies the inner state of a person in the process of moral choice which comes from God himself. Here we observe irrational management of actions and deeds not by man, but by God. Therefore, it can be concluded that conscience is one of the most crucial manifestations of the soul. Conscience, morality, and upbringing are closely interrelated. In a moral sense, God evaluates one’s actions through conscience. This way, the Lord wants to bring everyone closer to Himself and lead them through self-knowledge to God-knowledge, repentance, spiritual rebirth and renewal, and, finally, becoming God-like. A person’s conscience contains a supernatural power that is higher than a person and has a
superhuman essence. Conscience always governs the soul directing it to the absolute good, its source, and the Creator.

CONSCIENCE – LAW OF GOD. We believe it to be appropriate to emphasize that each person is brought before the court of their conscience. Thus, pointing out that one should not use idolatrous sacrifices out of conscience, the holy Apostle Paul adds: “I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience?” (1 Corinthians 10:29).

If a person has not lived their life morally and has never challenged themselves to the judgment of their conscience, they are defenseless before God. The consciousness of the Russian people contains an image of conscience as something one can rely on and thereby harbor the message of God (“rely on conscience”). Foreshadowing the “eternal”, the holy Apostle Paul emphasizes that although people serve God, “we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Conscience, shame, guilt, and dignity in their totality determine the scenario of an individual’s behavior. Besides, in the ethical consciousness or conscience is the voice of God proclaiming itself both the lawmaker and the judge (BISHOP ALEXANDER, n.d.).

The Catechism also defines conscience as the inner Law of God. Conscience now appears in the role of a category of perception of religious revelation, truth, and kindness. We are dealing with something integral to the inner nature of the human “I”. A person’s conscientious thinking presupposes sincerity, nobility, and striving for truth, even tragic and bitter, without being seduced by calming half-truths. A person who acts against their conscience sins. It is no coincidence that conscience can prompt, indicate, and testify (Romans 2:15; Romans 9:1; 2 Corinthians 1:12). In particular, concerning the Law and its fulfillment, the holy Apostle Paul turns to the Romans: “They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them” (Romans 2:15).

The greeting to the Corinthians says: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience: that we have had our discourse in the world, and more abundantly toward you, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God in simplicity and godly sincerity” (2 Corinthians 1:12); “I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1), in which conscience partly appears as a person’s awareness of their fundamental existential determination, as the call of the Existence itself addressed to them. Conscience is the voice of this call which is closely related to choice as the realization of human freedom and the relations a person enters through this freedom. It can be concluded that conscience is a system of relations in the sphere of the Absolute and Spirit, a sort of signpost guiding a person on their life path.

CONSCIENCE – PURITY. When determining what priests should be like, the holy Apostle Paul says: “They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9). In the Second Epistle: “I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers” (2 Timothy 1:3). Turning to Titus, Saint Paul emphasizes: “To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15).

Conscience is a spiritual concept independent of a person’s social status and material wealth. The expression “a pure conscience” from the Bible we interpret in the sense of a pure, sinless conscience. During the trial of the governor Felix, Paul responds to the accusations of the Jews: “Therefore, I myself strive to always have a blameless conscience before God and people” (Acts 24:16).

A “bad conscience” is the conscience of a thief who conspired with their soul, acted against their conscience, and, therefore, is constantly accompanied by a sense of fear. However, “one must obey not only out of fear of punishment but also according to conscience” (Romans 13:5). The more resolutely the process of a person’s internal, spiritual purification is carried out, the more sensitive the conscience becomes.
CONSCIENCE – KINDNESS. A good (kind) conscience is an integral part of the human soul. By no coincidence, the pages of Holy Scripture often contain the phrase “good conscience” (1 Peter 3:16; Acts 23:1; Hebrew 13:18; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Timothy 1:19). In particular, in the First Epistle to the Council, the holy Apostle Paul says: “keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3:16). Before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the apostle said: “… I have lived with all a good conscience before God to this day” (Acts 23:1). The First Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy says the following: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). Therefore, love and conscience present the most important forms of spiritual relations between people in the sphere of the Absolute and Spirit.

CONSCIENCE – SOUL, HEART. The soul and heart are the sanctuary of human conscience, a sort of home for its existence. Calling on the Corinthians to be reconciled with God, the Holy Apostle Paul proclaims: “What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience” (2 Corinthians 5:11).

CONSCIENCE – REPROACH. The Scriptures speak of “convicted by the conscience” (John 8:9) as Cain and Judas were troubled by conscience.

CONSCIENCE – ANTAGONIST OF GUILE, EVIL. This association complements the binary position “conscience – kindness”. Letter to the Hebrews says: “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). A crafty conscience needs cleansing, a sort of catharsis. Outlining the duties of a servant of God, the holy Apostle Paul points out that people depart from the faith “through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2).

CONSCIENCE – ILLNESS, WEAKNESS. A person needs to develop a sense of conscience since a sick, frail conscience can easily be “defiled”: “When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” (1 Corinthians 8:12).

A sense of conscience needs to be developed in a person since a weak conscience can easily be “defiled”: “wounding their conscience when it is weak” (1 Corinthians 8:12). “Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:12).

CONCLUSION

Having studied the mental structure of the axiological concept of “conscience” in biblical aspect, we identify the predominant semantic ideas about the aforementioned category. Conscience refers to: 1) internal evaluation, moral self-control, and the internal awareness of the morality of one’s actions, a sense of responsibility for one’s behavior before the human community; 2) the inner conviction of what is good and what is evil; 3) awareness of the correspondence of one’s behavior to values; 4) an individual’s ability to independently formulate ethical obligations for themselves; 5) the truth of life, the highest moral law; 6) the norm of life. Analysis in the Christian (biblical) aspect of other axiological concepts (will, faith, truth) may become a prospect for further research. The limitations of the study include the analysis in the study of only the Synoidal translation of the text of the New Testament. The field of the analyzed concept is covered by the categories “assessment”, “morality”, “conviction”, “consciousness”, “duty”, “repentance”, and “deed”. According to our observations, the word “conscience” is mentioned in the Bible 32 times in total, of which 28 mentions are found in the “New Testament”. The concept of “conscience” is represented in a binary fashion in the planes of both good and evil. The key words in the text of Holy Scripture are the expressions “good conscience” and “clear conscience”.

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The concept of "conscience" as an ethical category

O conceito de "consciência" como categoria ética

El concepto de "conciencia" como categoría ética

Resumo
O conceito de "consciência" é um dos componentes mais antigos da axiosfera e o fator central na autoconsciência moral do indivíduo. Esse fenômeno está intimamente relacionado com as características da posição existencial de uma pessoa no mundo. O estudo apresenta um modelo associativo do conceito de "consciência" no discurso cultural bíblico. Os componentes semânticos do conceito são determinados e seus significados bíblicos são considerados.

Palavras-chave: Consciência. Bíblia. Cristianismo. Axiologia. Axiosfera.

Abstract
The concept of "conscience" is one of the oldest components in the axiosphere and the central factor in the moral self-awareness of the individual. This phenomenon is closely related to the features of a person’s existential position in the world. The study presents an associative model of the concept of "conscience" in the biblical cultural discourse. The semantic components of the concept are determined and its biblical meanings are considered.

Keywords: Conscience. Bible. Christianity. Axiology. Axiosphere.

Resumen
El concepto de "conciencia" es uno de los componentes más antiguos de la axosfera y el factor central en la autoconciencia moral del individuo. Este fenómeno está estrechamente relacionado con las características de la posición existencial de una persona en el mundo. El estudio presenta un modelo asociativo del concepto de "conciencia" en el discurso cultural bíblico. Se determinan los componentes semántricos del concepto y se consideran sus significados bíblicos.

Palabras-clave: Conciencia. Biblia. Cristianismo. Axiología. Axiosfera.