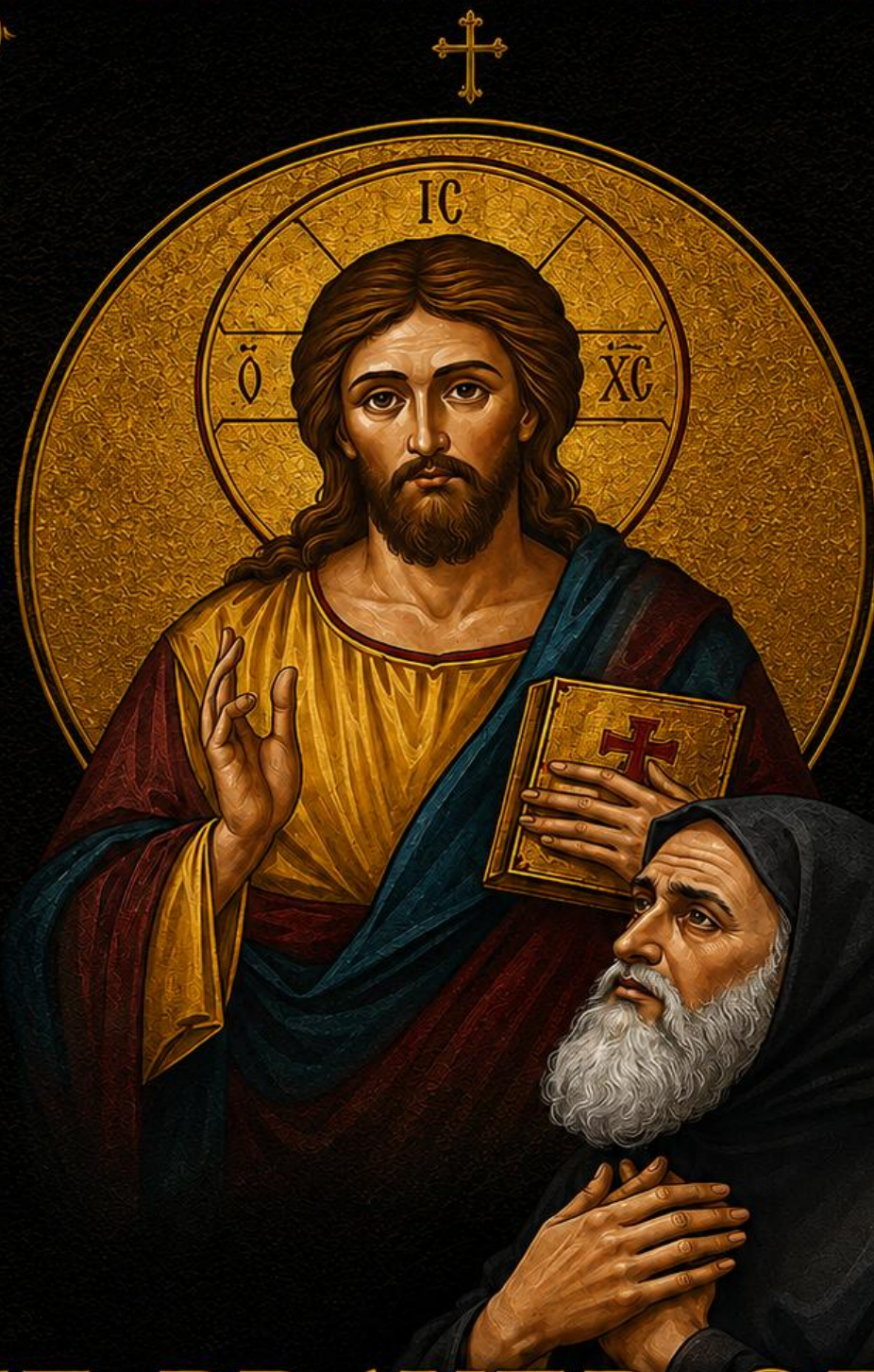




THE PRAYER OF

A PATH TOWARD
CHRIST

Jesus

ARCHBISHOP BASILIO,
ARCHBISHOP OF SANTIAGO
AND ALL CHILE



-----*The Jesus Prayer – A Path to Christ*-----

WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS MOST REVEREND EXCELLENCY



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Foreword

The Jesus Prayer, also known as the Prayer of the Heart, is a treasure trove of the Orthodox tradition that has guided generations of the faithful to the living sense of God's presence. This prayer has been a basic instrument from the sands of the Egyptian deserts to the consecrated life in the monasteries of Mount Athos, and as such it has been instrumental in transforming lives and bringing the soul and conscience of believers closer to the Risen Christ.

In this world so full of distractions and daily noises, this Prayer aims to give us peace, ceasing to be an exclusively monastic practice and opening the way to give tranquility and new life to all who are capable of living it and keeping it in their mind and heart.

This prayer, simple in its form, has in itself an overwhelming majesty and depth, consisting of the following few words: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The intention of this text is none other than to be able to help the faithful on their spiritual journey, trying to serve as a guide to be able to understand this essential element in the life of the Christian. This will be done through different elements which range from historical exploration to a personal analysis of its practice and fruits, passing through the various basic theological elements that it teaches us and aims to make our own.



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History of Chotki (ЧОТКИ)

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) (from the Greek κομποσκοίνι, "rope of knots"), also known as chotki in the Slavic tradition, is a prayer cord used mainly in the Orthodox Church and in some Eastern Christian communities to facilitate the practice of constant prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, sinner." Its history and development are deeply linked to Christian monasticism and Eastern spirituality.

Origin (4th century)

Chotki (ЧОТКИ) has its roots in early Christianity, particularly in the monastic movement of the **Desert Fathers** in Egypt, during the fourth century. Inspired by St. Paul's exhortation to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), monks were looking for practical methods to maintain constant prayer. Many of these monks were illiterate and could not recite the 150 psalms a day, as was customary, so they resorted to short and repetitive prayers, such as the *Kyrie eleison* or the Jesus Prayer.

- **St. Pachomius the Great:** St. Pachomius, founder of cenobitic monasticism, is credited with the creation of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in the fourth century. He designed a rope with knots so that the monks could count their prayers and prostrations (*metanias*), especially those who could not read. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) replaced more rudimentary methods, such as throwing pebbles into a bowl, which were impractical.
- **St. Anthony the Abbot:** Tradition also relates that St. Anthony the Great, considered the father of monasticism, received the inspiration for Chotki (ЧОТКИ). According to one legend, while he was praying and tying simple knots in a rope to count his prayers, the demon untied the knots to discourage him. An angel (or in some versions, the Virgin Mary) taught him to braid complex knots in the form of crosses, which the devil could not undo. These



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knots, formed by seven interlocking crosses, became the basis of the design of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ).

- Tradition attributes the creation of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to Saint Basil (4th century), who would have taught how to use a knotted cord to imitate the angels who "weave hymns to God without ceasing".

Evolution and symbolism

Over time, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) established itself as an essential spiritual tool in Eastern Christianity, especially in the monasteries of Mount Athos and other Orthodox communities. Its design and use evolved, acquiring a deep theological symbolism:

Material and colors: Traditionally, it is made with black virgin wool, which symbolizes humility, penance and belonging to the flock of Christ. The color black also represents death to sin and the world. In some traditions, colors such as white (purity) or burgundy (the blood of Christ) are used.

Knots: Each knot is made up of seven interlocking crosses, symbolizing the seven days of creation and fullness in Christ. The knots are a reminder of the union between earthly life and divine grace.

Number of knots: The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) can vary in length, with 33 knots (for the years of Christ's life), 50, 100, 150 or more, depending on the liturgical or ascetic usage. The 100-knot ones are the most common in the monastic field, while the 33-knot ones are popular among the laity.

Cross and tassel: At the end of the cord there is usually a woven or metallic cross, symbolizing Christ's redemptive sacrifice. In some cases, it includes a tassel that, according to tradition, represents the tears of monks during deep prayer or the splendor of divine glory.

Use and dissemination



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Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is used to count repetitions of the Jesus Prayer, a central practice in Orthodox spirituality known as hesychasm, which seeks union with God through the prayer of the heart. The monks and laypeople carry it in their left hand, passing the knots with their right while making the sign of the cross with the three central fingers, in honor of the Holy Trinity

Monasteries and laity: From the ninth century, the use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ) spread from the monastic sphere to the Christian people, especially in the East under the influence of Mount Athos. In the West, Benedictine monks, heirs of the Desert Fathers, also adopted similar practices, which evolved into the Catholic rosary in the 13th century.

Relationship with the rosary: After the Eastern Schism (1054), the Orthodox Church maintained the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), while in the West the rosary was developed, centered on the Hail Mary and the Marian mysteries. Although they share a common origin, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) focuses on the Jesus Prayer and theology of theosis (deification), while the rosary has a more Mariological character.

Cultural influence

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is not only a religious tool, but also a cultural symbol in Orthodox communities. In Greece, his design inspired komboloi, a beaded cord used secularly to relax or relieve stress, though without religious purpose. In addition, some branches of Islam adopted a similar object, the tasbeih, influenced by the Byzantine Chotki (ЧОТКИ).

Contemporary Meaning

Today, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is still a living practice among Orthodox Christians, both monks and laypeople, and is also used by some Eastern Catholics and Anglican communities. Its simplicity and depth make it a tangible reminder of the call to holiness and unceasing prayer. Some doctors even recommend it as a tool to reduce anxiety, by combining rhythmic repetition with concentration.



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In short, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is much more than a string of knots: it is a spiritual heritage of early Christianity, a symbol of the struggle against temptations, and a means of seeking union with God. Its history, from the deserts of Egypt to modern monasteries, reflects the perseverance of Christians in their *pursuit of constant prayer*.



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The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Bible

The biblical justification of **Chotki (ЧОТКИ)**, as a tool for constant prayer in the Orthodox tradition, is based on several passages of Scripture that emphasize the importance of unceasing prayer, repetition in prayer, and the search for communion with God. Although the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a specific object does not appear in the Bible, its use is based on spiritual principles derived from the Holy Scriptures, especially in the context of the **Jesus Prayer** ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"). Below are the main biblical foundations:

1. Call to constant prayer

Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is used to fulfill the biblical command to pray without ceasing, a central practice in Christian spirituality:

- **1 Thessalonians 5:17:** "Pray without ceasing." This verse is the main basis for the use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ), as monks and laypeople employ it to maintain continuous prayer throughout the day, especially by repeating the Jesus Prayer.
- **Ephesians 6:18:** "Praying at all times with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching over it with all perseverance." This passage reinforces the need for persistent prayer, which the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) facilitates by counting sentences and maintaining concentration.

2. Example of Repetitive Sentences

The repetition of short prayers, such as the Jesus Prayer, finds support in biblical examples of persistent, repetitive prayers:

- **Luke 18:1-8 (Parable of the Persistent Widow):** Jesus teaches that "it is necessary to pray always and not lose heart." The widow who insists on her supplication to the judge is a model of perseverance in prayer, which the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) helps to practice.



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- **Matthew 26:44:** During the agony in Gethsemane, Jesus prays three times saying "the same words." This shows that the repetition of a prayer is not vain, but an expression of fervor and dependence on God.
- **Psalm 136:** This psalm repeats in every verse the phrase "for his mercy endures forever," demonstrating that repetition in praise and supplication is a biblical practice.

3. Petition for mercy

The Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), is directly inspired by biblical passages that invoke divine mercy:

- **Luke 18:13 (Parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee):** The tax collector prays, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This humble plea is at the heart of Jesus' Prayer, which seeks God's grace and forgiveness.
- **Matthew 15:22 and 20:30-31:** In these passages, the Canaanite woman and the blind men of Jericho cry out repeatedly, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me." These repeated supplications reflect the spirit of prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ).

4. Confession of the name of Jesus

The Jesus Prayer invokes the name of Christ, which is deeply rooted in biblical theology:

- **Philippians 2:9-11:** "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by repeating the name of Jesus, honors his divinity and salvific power.
- **Acts 4:12:** "And in no one else is there salvation; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The constant invocation of Jesus' name in prayer reflects this central truth.



5. Spiritual Warfare and Vigilance

Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is also used as a tool to keep vigilant against temptations, which has biblical roots:

- **Matthew 26:41:** "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." Chotki (ЧОТКИ) helps believers to remain attentive and combat spiritual distractions through constant prayer.
- **Ephesians 6:12:** "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers." The Orthodox tradition sees the knots of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), with their intertwined crosses, as a spiritual weapon against the forces of evil.

6. Simplicity and Humility in Prayer

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) encourages simple and humble prayer, in line with the teachings of Jesus:

- **Matthew 6:7-8:** Although Jesus warns against "talking much" in prayer like the pagans, the context refers to empty and ostentatious words. The Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), is short, sincere and focused on dependence on God, avoiding vanity.
- **Psalms 51:17:** "The sacrifices of God are the broken spirit; you will not despise a contrite and humble heart, O God." The humble repetition of Jesus' Prayer reflects this spirit of contrition.

Theological context

In the Orthodox tradition, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is not an end in itself, but a means to internalize prayer and attain **theosis** (union with God). This practice is aligned with the biblical teaching of **Romans 8:26** ("the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for what we should ask for as we ought we do not know, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us"), since the Prayer of Jesus seeks to open the heart to divine grace.

In summary, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) has a solid biblical justification in the calls to pray without ceasing, the examples of repetitive and humble supplications, the invocation of the name of Jesus, and the need for



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spiritual vigilance. It is a practical tool that helps Christians live out the principles of Scripture in their quest for constant communion with God.



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Liturgy and Chotki (ЧОТКИ)

In the **Orthodox Church**, the **liturgy** and the **Chotki (ЧОТКИ)** (prayer rope) are deeply interconnected, as both are expressions of the spiritual life that seek communion with God and **theosis** (union with the divine). Although the liturgy is the communal and sacramental prayer of the Church, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a personal and ascetic prayer tool, together they form a complementary whole in Orthodox theology and practice

1. Complementarity between personal and community prayer

Orthodox theology does not separate personal prayer from community prayer; both are essential aspects of life in Christ. The liturgy, especially the **Divine Liturgy** (the Eucharist), is the center of ecclesial life, where believers participate in the mysteries (sacraments) and offer praise to God in community. Chotki (ЧОТКИ), on the other hand, encourages constant prayer outside the temple, particularly the **Jesus Prayer** ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"), which keeps the believer in a state of continuous prayer.

- **Preparation for the liturgy:** The use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ) prepares the heart for participation in the liturgy. The repetition of the Jesus Prayer cultivates humility, repentance, and spiritual attention, essential virtues for approaching the sacraments, especially **Confession** and the **Eucharist**. In the Orthodox tradition, a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17) is necessary to receive the grace of the mysteries, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) helps to achieve this state.
- **Extension of the liturgy:** Chotki (ЧОТКИ) allows the liturgical experience to be prolonged in daily life. The Orthodox liturgy, with its wealth of hymns, prayers, and Trinitarian invocations, permeates the mind of the believer, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) acts as a tangible reminder to bring that spirituality to the home, work, or any circumstance. For example, the Jesus



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Prayer reflects the spirit of liturgical supplications such as the *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord, have mercy").

2. Common roots in the monastic tradition

Both the Orthodox liturgy and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) have origins in Christian monasticism, particularly in the **Desert Fathers** (4th century) and the monasteries of **Mount Athos**. Monks developed both liturgical forms and ascetic practices to live in constant communion with God.

- **Monastic influence:** In monasteries, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is used to fulfill the command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) during non-liturgical hours, while the liturgy structures community life. For example, on Mount Athos, monks combine long liturgical services with the personal prayer of Chotki (ЧОТКИ), creating a continuity between the two. This practice has spread to the laity, who adopt Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to emulate monastic spirituality in the world.
- **Hesychasm and liturgy:** Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is central to **hesychasm**, the orthodox mystical tradition that seeks inner stillness (*hesychia*) and prayer of the heart. Hesychast theology, championed by figures such as **St. Gregory Palamas**, sees the liturgy as a participation in the uncreated divine light, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a means of internalizing that experience. The Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), reflects the Trinitarian and Christological invocations of the liturgy, such as the doxologies ("Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit").

3. Shared symbolism

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the liturgy share a rich theological symbolism that reflects the Orthodox faith:

- **Christ-centered:** The Orthodox liturgy is Christ-centered, celebrating the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ, especially in the Eucharist, where believers commune with the Body and Blood of Christ. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by facilitating the



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Jesus Prayer, focuses the mind on the name of Christ, confessing His divinity and mercy (Philippians 2:9-11). Both are acts of worship that proclaim Christ as Savior.

- **The Cross:** The cross is a central symbol in both. In the liturgy, the cross is present in icons, gestures (the sign of the cross) and prayers that recall Christ's sacrifice. In the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), each knot is made up of seven interlocking crosses, symbolizing redemption and Christ's victory over sin. This symbolism unites personal prayer with the liturgical narrative of salvation.
- **Repentance and Mercy:** Both the liturgy and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) emphasize the need for repentance. The liturgical litanies include supplications such as "Lord, have mercy," which resonate with the Jesus Prayer. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) reinforces this penitential attitude, preparing the believer to receive the divine mercy celebrated in the liturgy.

4. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as sacramental preparation

In Orthodox theology, the sacraments (mysteries) require a proper spiritual disposition. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) plays a key role in this process:

- **Confession:** Before Confession, the Orthodox often use Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to reflect on their sins and cultivate repentance. The Jesus Prayer, with its plea for mercy, helps the believer to recognize his or her sinfulness (Luke 18:13) and to seek reconciliation with God.
- **Eucharist:** Participation in the Divine Liturgy requires purity of heart and spiritual preparation. Chotki (ЧОТКИ), used before or after the liturgy, helps to keep the mind focused on Christ, ensuring that the believer approaches Communion with reverence and faith.
- **Other Mysteries:** In moments of Anointing of the Sick, Marriage or Baptism, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) can be used to accompany



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personal prayers, reinforcing the connection with the grace imparted in these sacraments.

5. Togetherness in everyday life

The Orthodox liturgy is not limited to the temple; It is a lifestyle that permeates all the actions of the believer. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) acts as a bridge between the liturgy and daily life:

- **Spiritual continuity:** The laity, who cannot attend the liturgy daily, use Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to maintain a connection with church life. For example, reciting the Jesus Prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) during work or travel is a form of "personal liturgy" that complements community services.
- **Monastic life in the world:** Chotki (ЧОТКИ) allows lay people to adopt monastic practices, such as constant prayer, without abandoning their secular responsibilities. This reflects the Orthodox teaching that all Christians are called to holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16), whether in the monastery or in the world.

6. Eschatological dimension

Both the liturgy and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) have an eschatological orientation, pointing towards the Kingdom of God. The Divine Liturgy is an anticipation of the heavenly banquet, where believers join the angels in praising God (Revelation 4:8). The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by keeping the believer in a state of vigilance and prayer, prepares him for the final encounter with Christ (Matthew 25:13). Both, therefore, orient the Christian life towards eternity.

7. Liturgical Practice of Chotki (ЧОТКИ)

In some contexts, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is directly integrated into monastic liturgical life. For example:

- **Prayer rules:** In monasteries, monks can use the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to observe specific "rules of prayer," such as reciting the Jesus Prayer a certain number of as part of their preparation for liturgical services.



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- **Midnight Office and Canonical Hours:** Among liturgical offices, monks use the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to maintain prayer in moments of silence, ensuring that the spirit of the liturgy remains alive throughout the day.

The union between the Orthodox liturgy and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) lies in their shared purpose: to bring the believer into communion with God through prayer, repentance, and participation in the divine life. The liturgy offers the communal and sacramental framework, while the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) provides a personal and portable means of extending that experience into everyday life. Together, they generate a synergy that reflects the orthodox theology of life as a continuous act of worship, where personal and communal prayer are intertwined to lead the soul towards **theosis**. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), far from being an accessory, is a living link with the liturgy, uniting the heart of the believer with the praise of the Church and the presence of Christ.



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The Holy Trinity and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ)

In the theology of the Orthodox Church, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) (prayer string) and its use in the recitation of the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, sinner") have a deep connection with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This relationship is manifested both in the symbolism of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and in the theology of prayer that accompanies it, reflecting the Orthodox faith in the unity and distinction of the three divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The following is an exploration of how the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) relates to the Holy Trinity:

1. The Jesus Prayer as a Trinitarian confession

The Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), is intrinsically Trinitarian, as it reflects the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity:

- ❖ Son (Jesus Christ): Prayer directly invokes "Jesus Christ," confessing his divinity and humanity as the Second Person of the Trinity. The name of Jesus, according to orthodox theology, carries within itself the divine presence (Philippians 2:9-11), and his invocation is an act of adoration of the Son.
- ❖ Father: The phrase "Son of God" recognizes the Son's eternal relationship with the Father, affirming that Jesus Christ is begotten by the Father from before all ages. This filial relationship is central to orthodox Trinitarian theology.
- ❖ Holy Spirit: Although not explicitly mentioned in prayer, the Holy Spirit is implied as the one who inspires and sustains prayer in the heart of the believer. According to Romans 8:26 ("the Spirit himself intercedes for us"), the Jesus Prayer, especially in the practice of hesychasm, is a fruit of the action of the Spirit, who unites the person praying with Christ and the Father.



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The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by facilitating the repetition of this prayer, becomes a means of continually meditating on the Trinity, internalizing faith in the unity of the three divine Persons.

2. Trinitarian symbolism in the Chotki (ЧОТКИ)

The design and use of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) are imbued with symbolism that reflects Trinitarian theology:

Three fingers in prayer: In the Orthodox tradition, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is held with the left hand, and the knots are passed with the right hand, using the index and middle fingers together, while the thumb touches the tips of these fingers, forming the sign of the cross. This gesture symbolizes the Trinity (the three fingers represent the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the dual nature of Christ (the two fingers together). Every knot passed is, therefore, an act of Trinitarian worship.

Knots of seven crosses: Each knot of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is composed of seven intertwined crosses, a number that in Christian theology can allude to divine perfection. Although not explicitly Trinitarian, the act of weaving the knots reflects the unity and interconnectedness of the Persons of the Trinity, who are distinct but indivisible. The cross, as a symbol of redemption, points to the Son, but always in relation to the Father and the Spirit.

Circular structure: The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) usually forms a circle, symbolizing eternity and the unity of God. In Orthodox theology, the Trinity is an eternal communion (perichoresis), where the three Persons coexist in perfect unity. The circularity of Chotki (ЧОТКИ) reflects this reality, reminding the worshipper of the divine life that he seeks to attain through theosis.

3. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Trinitarian theosis



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Orthodox theology teaches that the purpose of the Christian life is theosis, participation in the divine life of the Trinity. Chotki (ЧОТКИ), as a tool of hesychastic practice, plays a key role in this process:

Union with the Son: By invoking the name of Jesus with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), the believer is united to Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity. According to John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me"), Christ is the mediator who leads the person praying to the Father.

Access to the Father: Jesus' prayer, in recognizing Christ as "Son of God", places the believer in Christ's filial relationship with the Father. In orthodox theology, Christians are adopted as children of God by grace (Galatians 4:4-7), participating in the Trinitarian life.

Action of the Holy Spirit: The repetition of Jesus' Prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), especially in hesychasm, seeks to move the prayer to the heart, a process that depends on the grace of the Holy Spirit. St. Seraphim of Sarov taught that the goal of the Christian life is to "acquire the Holy Spirit," and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a means of opening the soul to this divine presence.

Thus, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is not only a reminder of the Trinity, but a tool to experience communion with the three divine Persons, leading the believer to the Trinitarian life.

4. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in the Trinitarian liturgy

The Orthodox liturgy is steeped in references to the Holy Trinity, from doxologies ("Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit") to Eucharistic prayers. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) complements this liturgical spirituality by keeping the believer in a Trinitarian disposition outside the temple:

Reflection of the doxologies: The Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), is a condensed form of Trinitarian praise found in the liturgy.



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Each repetition is an act of worship that honors the unity and distinction of the divine Persons, similar to liturgical doxologies.

Preparation for the Eucharist: The Eucharist, the center of the Orthodox liturgy, is a Trinitarian mystery: offered to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by preparing the heart of the believer through the Jesus Prayer, disposes him to participate fully in this Trinitarian act, uniting personal prayer with sacramental communion.

5. Spiritual Struggle and the Trinity

In the Orthodox tradition, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is also a "spiritual weapon" in the fight against temptations, and this dimension is linked to the Trinity:

Trinitarian protection: The sign of the cross made with the three fingers as each knot passes invokes the protection of the Trinity against the forces of evil. Orthodox theology sees the cross as the sign of Christ's (Son's) victory, offered to the Father, and sealed by the Spirit.

Invocation of the divine name: The repetition of the name of Jesus with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is an act of trust in the Trinitarian power. According to Acts 4:12, the name of Jesus is the only one that saves, and its constant invocation strengthens the believer in the spiritual life.

6. Trinitarian eschatological perspective

Chotki (ЧОТКИ) directs the believer towards eternal life, which in Orthodox theology is a full participation in Trinitarian communion. The repetition of Jesus' Prayer is a foretaste of heavenly praise, where saints and angels eternally worship the Trinity (Revelation 4:8). The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by keeping the worshipper in a state of vigilance and prayer, prepares him for this eschatological destiny.



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The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is deeply linked to the Holy Trinity in Orthodox theology through the Jesus Prayer, its symbolism, and its spiritual purpose. Every knot, every repetition, and every gesture reflects faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, inviting the believer to live in communion with Trinitarian life. As a tool of hesychastic prayer, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) not only honors the Trinity, but guides the worshipper towards theosis, enabling him to participate, by grace, in the unity and eternal love of the three divine Persons. In this sense, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a bridge between earthly life and Trinitarian glory, uniting personal prayer with the liturgical adoration of the Church.



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St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Nectarius and St. Paios, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ)

Saints such as St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Nectarius of Aegina, and St. Paisios of Mount Athos have a significant relationship with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), either through their teaching, their spiritual practice, or their promotion within the hesychast tradition.

1. Saint Basil the Great (330-379)

Context: St. Basil, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, was bishop of Caesarea, a theologian, and the father of Eastern monasticism. His monastic writings and rules profoundly influenced Orthodox spirituality.

Relationship with Chotki (ЧОТКИ) :

Monastic foundation: St. Basil laid the foundations of Eastern community monasticism, emphasizing constant prayer, manual labor, and meditation on Scripture. Although there is no direct evidence that he used Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as it is known today, his emphasis on unceasing prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17) laid the groundwork for practices such as the Jesus Prayer, which Chotki (ЧОТКИ) facilitates. Their monastic "Constitutions" promoted a structured prayer life, which later monks adapted with tools such as the Chotki (ЧОТКИ).

Trinitarian Theology: St. Basil was a key proponent of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially against Arianism. His writings on the distinction between the essence (ousia) and the energies of God influenced Hesychast theology, which links the Jesus Prayer with the experience of Trinitarian grace. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), when used to invoke the name of Jesus, reflects this theology, since prayer is a Trinitarian act that unites the worshipper with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual practice: Basil taught that prayer should permeate all of life, a principle that Chotki (ЧОТКИ) embodies by allowing monks and laypeople to pray at any time. Its influence on liturgy and monastic life



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created an environment where tools such as Chotki (ЧОТКИ) could be developed.

Contribution: St. Basil provided the theological and monastic framework that made possible the spread of constant prayer, paving the way for the use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in the Orthodox tradition.

2. St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359)

Context: St. Gregory, archbishop of Thessalonica, is the leading theologian of hesychasm, defending the distinction between the essence and the uncreated energies of God. His life and writings are intimately linked to Mount Athos, the birthplace of Chotki (ЧОТКИ).

Relationship with Chotki (ЧОТКИ) :

Defense of Hesychasm: St. Gregory Palamas is known for his defense of the hesychast monks, who practiced the Jesus Prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to achieve the "prayer of the heart". In his conflict with Barlaam of Calabria, who criticized hesychasm and ridiculed monks as "omphaloskopos" (navel-gazers), Palamas theologically justified the practice of repetitive prayer, arguing that it allows the believer to participate in the uncreated divine energies.

Trinitarian Theology: In his works, such as the Triads in Defense of the Hesychast Saints, Palamas developed the distinction between the divine essence (inaccessible) and the uncreated energies (accessible), a teaching that connects directly with the Jesus Prayer. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by facilitating this prayer, helps the worshipper to experience the divine light (the "taboric light" of the Transfiguration), which is a manifestation of the Trinity. Prayer invokes the Son, addresses the Father and is sustained by the Holy Spirit, reflecting the Trinitarian communion.

Spiritual practice: Palamas, trained on Mount Athos, used Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as part of his ascetic discipline. He taught that the repetition of the Jesus Prayer, accompanied by techniques such as controlled



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breathing, brings prayer to the heart, allowing the believer to "see" the divine light. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) was essential to maintain rhythm and concentration in this practice.

Contribution: St. Gregory Palamas elevated the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to a theological level, integrating it into the hesychast doctrine and linking it to the Trinitarian experience of divine grace. His defense of hesychasm ensured that Chotki (ЧОТКИ) became a universal orthodox practice.

3. Saint Nectarius of Aegina (1846-1920)

Context: St. Nectarius, bishop of Pentapolis and founder of a monastery in Aegina, is known for his humility, miracles, and spiritual writings. He is a modern saint whose life reflects monastic spirituality.

Relationship with Chotki (ЧОТКИ) :

Monastic life: St. Nectarius lived and promoted monastic life, founding the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Aegina. In this context, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) was a common tool among nuns to practice the Jesus Prayer, following the Hesychast tradition. Although there are no specific texts of St. Nectarius on Chotki (ЧОТКИ), his emphasis on constant prayer and humility suggests that he considered it a valuable practice.

Trinitarian Theology: St. Nectarius wrote about the Holy Trinity, especially in his homilies, emphasizing the unity of the three divine Persons. The Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), reflects this theology by invoking the Son in relationship with the Father and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Their monastery, dedicated to the Trinity, reinforces this spiritual connection.

Spiritual practice: As a pastor and monk, St. Nectarius taught his disciples the importance of unceasing prayer to combat temptations and grow in holiness. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), as a portable tool, would have



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been a natural extension of his teaching, especially for nuns and laypeople who sought to imitate his prayer life.

Contribution: St. Nectarius, by revitalizing monastic life in the nineteenth century, helped to preserve and spread the practice of Chotki (ЧОТКИ), integrating it into the spiritual life of modern communities and connecting it with Trinitarian devotion.

4. Saint Countryians of Mount Athos (1924-1994)

St. Paios, a 20th-century Athonite monk, is known for his spiritual wisdom, practical advice, and prayer life. He is a key figure in contemporary Orthodox spirituality.

Relationship with Chotki (ЧОТКИ) :

Promotion of Chotki (ЧОТКИ): St. Paiosios emphasized the use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as an essential tool for constant prayer, both for monks and laity. In his teachings, he recommended carrying the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in one's hand or pocket and using it regularly to recite the Jesus Prayer, saying that "the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is like a spiritual machine gun against the devil." He himself used it constantly, even while working or counseling others.

Trinitarian Theology: St. Paisios taught that the Jesus Prayer is a Trinitarian act that unites the believer with the Holy Trinity. In his writings and dialogues, he explained that invoking the name of Jesus (Son) leads the person praying to the Father, while the Holy Spirit illuminates the heart to receive divine grace. Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by facilitating this prayer, is a means of living in the presence of the Trinity.

Spiritual practice: St. Paios saw the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a tool of simplicity and humility, accessible to all. He recounted stories of miracles associated with their use, such as protection from temptation or danger. He also taught that Chotki (ЧОТКИ) helps keep the mind focused on God, avoiding worldly distractions, and considered it a constant reminder of the divine presence.



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Contribution: St. Paisios popularized Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in the 20th century, making it relevant to modern Christians. His practical approach and emphasis on Trinitarian prayer made Chotki (ЧОТКИ) a universal spiritual practice, accessible both in monasteries and in lay life.

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Holy Trinity

The connection between these saints, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Holy Trinity can be summarized in the following points:

Trinitarian Theology: Each saint contributed to the understanding of the Trinity. St. Basil defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit, St. Gregory Palamas articulated the experience of divine energies, and St. Nectarius and St. Paisios promoted prayer as an act of communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by facilitating the Jesus Prayer, is a vehicle for this Trinitarian communion.

Hesychasm and prayer: Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a hesychast tool, especially promoted by St. Gregory Palamas and St. Paisios, which allows the believer to internalize prayer and experience the divine light, a manifestation of the Trinity. St. Basil and St. Nectarius, by encouraging monastic life, created the context for this practice.

Liturgical and personal unity: The four saints integrated personal prayer (Chotki (ЧОТКИ)) with the communal liturgy, which in the Orthodox tradition is profoundly Trinitarian. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) extends the liturgical doxology ("Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit") to everyday life.

St. Basil the Great provided the monastic and theological foundation for constant prayer, St. Gregory Palamas defended the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a hesychast tool linked to the Trinitarian experience, St. Nectarius integrated it into modern monastic life, and St. Paisios popularized it as a means accessible to all Christians. Together, these saints highlight the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a sacred instrument that unites the believer with the Holy Trinity, allowing participation in the divine life through the Jesus



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Prayer. His legacy ensures that the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) remains a pillar of Orthodox spirituality, connecting personal prayer with Trinitarian theology and the liturgical life of the Church



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On the Use of the Чo'TKI (Hutki) in the True Tradition of the Russian Church

The Prayer Cord

The Чóтки (Chótki), called in Greek *Κομποσχοῖνι* (*Komboskíni*), are one of the most venerated spiritual instruments of the Orthodox ascetic tradition. They are not a mere object of devotion, but an aid to the constant practice of prayer, according to the commandment of the Holy Apostle Paul:

"Pray without ceasing."
(*1 Thessalonians 5:17*)

The Russian Orthodox Church has retained the use of the Chatki since the reception of Byzantine monasticism, where the prayer cord was employed by the Desert Fathers as a means of keeping the attention of the mind and heart to God.

Spiritual Purpose

The Chatki help the Christian to maintain concentration during prayer and to avoid distraction. They do not possess virtue in themselves, but their value lies in the pious use made of them by those who pray.

The center of this practice is the **Jesus Prayer**:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

This prayer sums up the orthodox faith, the confession of the divinity of Christ, and the repentance of the believer.

The Holy Fathers teach that the constant repetition of this prayer, carried out with humility, obedience and interior vigilance, leads gradually to the purification of the heart.



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The use in the Russian tradition

In Russian tradition, both monastic and parochial, the Chótki have been used for centuries by bishops, priests, monks and lay faithful.

The monk usually wears them in his left hand or attached to the monastic belt, not as an ornament, but to have them always available for prayer.

The faithful can also use them daily with the blessing of their spiritual father.

In the pre-revolutionary Russian tradition, it was customary for many monks to tour the monastery or perform their manual labor, continuously repeating the Jesus Prayer with the help of the Chatki.

Number of knots

Chótki can have different numbers of knots, each suitable for a particular use.

The most common are:

- 33 knots, in remembrance of the years of Our Lord's earthly life.
- 50 knots.
- 100 knots, the most used by monks.
- 300 knots.
- 500 knots.
- 1000 knots for certain monastic rules.

They often include separators or beads every few knots to facilitate the calculation of the sentence rule.

The Rule of Prayer

The number of prayers should never become a source of pride or scruples. The purpose of the rule is to help the soul to acquire constancy in prayer.

Every Christian should observe the rule given to him by his spiritual father.



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Those who do not have a particular rule can humbly begin with a moderate number of repetitions, always seeking attention and repentance.

During the Divine Offices

When a member of the faithful attends the Divine Offices, the Chatki do not substitute for participation in liturgical prayers.

However, in certain moments of silence, during long readings or when the liturgical order permits, they can be used discreetly to repeat the Prayer of Jesus interiorly.

Monks usually do this without attracting attention and without distracting the other faithful.

In everyday life

Prayer with the Chótki can be performed:

- upon waking;
- before sleeping;
- during travel;
- while waiting;
- during manual work;
- before starting any important task;
- in times of sickness or affliction.

In this way, the whole day is sanctified by the constant remembrance of the Name of Jesus Christ.

The blessing of the Chótki

It is customary for Chatki to be blessed by a priest before they begin to be used regularly.

Once blessed, they should be treated with respect, avoiding leaving them in improper places or using them as an ornament or badge of spiritual prestige.



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Spiritual Warning

The Holy Fathers warn that the practice of the Jesus Prayer must always be linked to humility, obedience to the Church and participation in the Holy Mysteries.

No particular extraordinary experience, vision, or feeling should be sought. The true fruit of prayer is repentance, peace of heart, growth in love of God and neighbor, and perseverance in the Christian life.

As the Russian spiritual tradition teaches, progress in prayer does not depend on the number of knots traveled, but on God's mercy granted to the humble and contrite heart.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

May this holy invocation accompany the Christian in all times and places, until the Name of the Lord dwells unceasingly in his heart.



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Hesychasm in today's life

What is hesychasm?

Hesychasm (from the Greek *hesychia*, meaning "stillness," "silence," or "inner peace") is a spiritual and mystical tradition of the **Orthodox Church** that seeks union with God through constant prayer, introspection, and purification of the heart. It arose in the first centuries of Christianity, especially among the **Desert Fathers** (fourth century), and was fully developed into Orthodox monasticism, particularly on **Mount Athos**. Its central practice is the **Jesus Prayer** ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"), recited repeatedly, often with the help of the **Chotki (ЧОТКИ)** (prayer rope).

Main characteristics of hesychasm:

1. **Prayer of the heart:** Hesychasm seeks to move the Jesus Prayer from the lips to the mind and finally to the heart, becoming an "automatic" prayer that reflects the constant presence of God. This implies a state of inner stillness where worldly distractions fade away.
2. **Theology of divine energies:** According to **St. Gregory Palamas** (fourteenth century), hesychasts can experience the **uncreated energies** of God (such as the divine light of the Transfiguration), distinct from his inaccessible essence. This experience is a form of **theosis** (deification or union with God).
3. **Ascetic discipline:** Hesychasm combines prayer with practices such as fasting, vigilance, confession, and breath control to focus the mind and body on God.
4. **Trinitarian symbolism:** The Jesus Prayer is a Trinitarian act, invoking the Son, in relation to the Father, and sustained by the Holy Spirit, reflecting communion with the Holy Trinity.



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Historical origins:

- **Desert Fathers (4th century):** Monks such as **St. Anthony the Great** and **St. Macarius of Egypt** practiced constant prayer to fulfill the command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), traditionally attributed to St. Anthony, emerged as a tool for counting prayers.
- **Mount Sinai and Mount Athos:** In the 5th-6th centuries, figures such as **St. John Climacus** developed hesychast spirituality. In the fourteenth century, Mount Athos became its epicenter, with **St. Gregory Palamas** defending hesychasm against theological criticism.
- **Key texts:** Hesychast writings, such as the **Philokalia** (a compilation of spiritual texts from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries), are central to its practice. Philokalia, translated into Russian and English in the 19th and 20th centuries, spread hesychasm globally.

Impact of Hesychasm on Modern Life

Hesychasm, though rooted in Orthodox monasticism, has transcended its original context to influence modern life, both inside and outside the Orthodox Church. Its impact is seen in contemporary spirituality, psychology, culture, and religious practices. Its effects on today's world are detailed below:

Spiritual Revival in Orthodoxy

- **Popularization of the Jesus Prayer:** In the 20th century, figures such as **St. Paisios of Mount Athos** and **St. Sophronius of Essex** promoted hesychasm among the laity, making the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Jesus Prayer accessible to people outside monasteries. This has revitalized Orthodox spirituality in



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countries such as Greece, Russia, Serbia, and Romania, as well as in Orthodox communities in the West (USA, Western Europe).

- **Response to secularization:** In a world dominated by materialism and technology, hesychasm offers a spiritual alternative that emphasizes interiority and connection to the divine. The practice of Jesus' Prayer with Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is seen as an antidote to anxiety and spiritual disconnection, resonating with those who seek meaning beyond the mundane.
- **Global Spread:** The translation of **Philokalia** into English (by G.E.H. Palmer and Kallistos Ware in the 1970s-80s) and the emigration of Orthodox communities have brought hesychasm to global audiences. Books such as *The Russian Pilgrim* (an anonymous 19th-century account of a layman practicing the Jesus Prayer) have inspired Christians and non-Christians to explore this tradition.

Influence on psychology and well-being

- **Christian mindfulness:** Hesychasm shares similarities with modern meditation and mindfulness practices, such as mindfulness and stress reduction. The rhythmic repetition of the Jesus Prayer, accompanied by Chotki (ЧОТКИ), has calming effects, helping to reduce anxiety and improve concentration. Some Christian psychologists have integrated hesychasm into spiritual therapies, seeing its potential to foster emotional resilience.
- **Heart Focus:** Unlike many secular meditation practices, hesychasm emphasizes the relational dimension with God, making it appealing to those seeking an integrated spiritual approach. Modern studies on repetitive meditation have pointed out that practices such as hesychasm can decrease cortisol (stress hormone) and improve psychological well-being.
- **Practical applications:** In modern contexts, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is used by professionals, students, and parents to stay calm in



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stressful situations, such as before important meetings or during travel. St. Countryios recommended wearing the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a constant reminder of God's presence, a practice that resonates in today's urban life.

Impact on other Christian traditions

- **Ecumenism:** Hesychasm has influenced non-Orthodox Christians, especially Catholic and Anglican communities. For example, Eastern Catholics have adopted the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), and some Roman Catholics use it as a complement to the rosary. In Anglicanism, the *Anglican Prayer Beads* reflect the influence of hesychasm, adapting the Jesus Prayer to its spirituality.
- **Contemplative renewal:** Contemplative movements in Western Christianity, such as those promoted by **Thomas Merton** (a Trappist monk who studied hesychasm), have integrated hesychast elements, such as repetitive prayer and inner silence, into their practices. This has led to a rediscovery of Christian mysticism in the West.

Cultural and artistic relevance

- **Literature and film:** Hesychasm has inspired modern works that explore the spiritual quest. For example, the novel *The Russian Pilgrim* has been adapted into documentaries and academic studies, while films such as *Ostrov* (2006, Russia) portray the hesychast life of Orthodox monks, showing their impact on contemporary culture.
- **Iconography and craftsmanship:** Chotki (ЧОТКИ) making, often handmade in monasteries, is a form of sacred art that connects artisans with hesychast spirituality. Orthodox icons, which depict the divine light experienced by the hesychasts, also reflect this tradition in modern visual culture.



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Responding to Modern Challenges

- **Technological disconnection:** In an age of digital distractions, hesychasm offers a path to regain attention and stillness. The practice of Chotki (ЧОТКИ), which does not require technology, is a countercultural act that encourages disconnection from digital noise and reconnection with the divine.
- **Existential crisis:** The hesychast emphasis on humility and divine mercy (through the Jesus Prayer) answers the existential questions of modernity, such as the purpose of life and suffering. St. Nectarius of Aegina and St. Paios, both modern saints, taught that hesychast prayer is a source of comfort in times of adversity, a relevant teaching in contexts of economic, political, or personal crisis.
- **Spiritual ecology:** Some modern orthodox theologians have linked hesychasm with ecological responsibility, arguing that inner stillness fosters a harmonious relationship with creation, an urgent message in the age of climate change.

Challenges in modern life

- **Adapting to the modern rhythm:** Hesychast practice, which requires time and discipline, can be difficult in a fast-paced world. However, figures such as St. Paisios taught that even a few minutes a day with Chotki (ЧОТКИ) can transform one's spiritual life.
- **Misunderstandings:** Some modern critics see hesychasm as an esoteric or excessively monastic practice, but its spread among the laity demonstrates its universality. Spiritual education, through books and Orthodox retreats, is addressing these misunderstandings.
- **Syncretism:** The popularity of mindfulness has led some to merge hesychasm with secular practices, which can dilute their Trinitarian theological approach. The Orthodox Church



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emphasizes that hesychasm is inseparable from the Christian faith and sacramental life.

Hesychasm is a spiritual tradition that seeks inner stillness and union with God through the Jesus Prayer, with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as a key tool. *Its impact on modern life is significant, offering a path of prayer, peace, and purpose in a world marked by stress and disconnection.* From its revitalization in Orthodox spirituality to its influence on psychology, ecumenism, and culture, hesychasm demonstrates its timeless relevance. Saints such as **St. Basil**, **St. Gregory Palamas**, **St. Nectarius**, and **St. Paisios** have ensured that this deeply Trinitarian practice remains a beacon for modern Christians, inviting them to encounter God in the silence of the heart, even in the midst of the chaos of the 21st century.



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Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in modern life against the devil

In the modern context, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is still relevant as a spiritual weapon, especially in a world full of distractions and spiritual challenges:

- **Protection in daily life:** Modern Orthodox Christians use Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to counter contemporary temptations, such as anxiety, addiction to technology, or materialism, which the Orthodox tradition considers to be subtle demonic influences. **St. Countryios** recommended reciting the Jesus Prayer in times of stress or danger, such as before driving or during personal conflicts.
- **Personal exorcism:** Although formal exorcisms are performed by priests, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) allows laypeople to practice a form of "personal exorcism" by invoking the name of Jesus. The sign of the cross made with each knot reinforces this protection, reminding the devil of Christ's defeat on the cross.
- **Resistance to secular culture:** In a secular society that often trivializes the spiritual, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a tangible reminder of the reality of the spiritual battle. Its simplicity contrasts with the complexities of the modern world, offering an accessible means of standing firm against malign influences.

Specific practices

In the Orthodox tradition, Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is used specifically to combat the devil:

- **Prayer Rules:** Monks and laypeople may recite a fixed number of Jesus Prayers (e.g., 100 or 300) with the Chotki



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(ЧОТКИ), dedicating them to protection from temptations or deliverance from evil influences.

- **In times of temptation:** When an evil thought arises (*logisms*), the hesychasts teach to immediately resort to Chotki (ЧОТКИ), reciting the Jesus Prayer with fervor to expel temptation.
- **Chotki Blessing (ЧОТКИ):** Many Chotki (ЧОТКИ) are blessed by priests or monks, which gives them a special grace for spiritual struggle. Some worshippers wear Chotki (ЧОТКИ) blessed on Mount Athos as spiritual amulets.

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a powerful spiritual weapon in the fight against the devil within the Orthodox tradition, thanks to its symbolism, its connection to the Jesus Prayer and its role in hesychast practice. The knots in the shape of a cross, the invocation of the name of Jesus and the Trinitarian dimension of prayer make it a shield against the forces of evil. Saints such as **St. Basil**, **St. Gregory Palamas**, **St. Nectarius**, and **St. Paisios** have emphasized its effectiveness, from its theological foundations to its practical application. In modern life, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) remains relevant, offering Christians a simple yet profound means to resist temptations, purify the heart, and remain in the protective presence of the Holy Trinity, defeating the devil with the humility and power of Christ's name.



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The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Most Holy Theotokos

In the tradition of the **Orthodox Church**, the **Chotki (ЧОТКИ)** (prayer rope) has a significant connection with the **Most Holy Theotokos** (Mother of God), the Virgin Mary, although this relationship is more implicit than explicit compared to its primary use to recite the **Jesus Prayer** ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"). The Theotokos, as the mother of Christ and a central figure in Orthodox spirituality, is deeply linked to the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) through her role in the economy of salvation, her intercession, the traditions associated with her life, and her presence in hesychast practice.

Symbolism of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Theotokos

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), as a spiritual tool, carries a symbolism that resonates with the Theotokos, whose life and role are intrinsically linked to the Incarnation and redemption:

- **Knots and Mary's humility:** The knots of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), woven in the shape of seven crosses, symbolize Christ's humility and obedience on the cross. The Theotokos, as a model of humility ("Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38)), is a living example of the attitude that Chotki (ЧОТКИ) fosters in reciting the Jesus Prayer. The repetition of the prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) invites us to imitate the humility of Mary, who allowed the Incarnation of the Word.
- **Wool and purity:** The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), traditionally made of virgin wool, evokes the purity of the Theotokos, often described as the "immaculate wool" that gave birth to the Lamb of God. In the Orthodox liturgy, Mary is celebrated as the "hair of Gideon" (Judges 6:36-38), a symbol of her purity and receptivity to divine grace, a theme that resonates with the Chotki's purpose (ЧОТКИ) to purify the heart to receive Christ.



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- **Tassel and tears:** The tassel at the end of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is sometimes interpreted as a symbol of the tears of repentance or of the Theotokos, who wept at the foot of the cross (John 19:25-27). In Orthodox spirituality, Mary is seen as the compassionate mother who intercedes for humanity, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) can be a reminder of her empathy and maternal love.

2. Legends and traditions associated with the Theotokos

The Orthodox tradition links the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) with the Theotokos through monastic stories and practices that highlight her role as a protector and spiritual guide:

- **Origin of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ):** A variant of the legend about the origin of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) involves the Theotokos. It is said that **St. Anthony the Great**, while fighting the demon who undid the knots of his prayer rope, was visited by the Virgin Mary, who taught him how to weave the complex knots in the form of crosses that the devil could not undo. Although this story is more apocryphal than historical, it reflects the orthodox belief in the Theotokos as a mediator and protector in spiritual struggle, a central theme in the use of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) against the devil (as discussed previously).
- **Mount Athos and the Theotokos:** Mount Athos, the birthplace of Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and hesychasm, is dedicated to the Theotokos, known as the "Gardener of the Holy Mountain". The Athonite monks, who use Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as part of their daily discipline, consider Mary their patroness and protector. Many Athonite traditions attribute to the intercession of the Theotokos the strength to persevere in the hesychastic prayer, which the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) facilitates.
- **Belt of the Theotokos:** In some monasteries, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is compared to the holy belt of the Theotokos, a venerated relic symbolizing her protection. Just as the belt is a sign



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of her maternal presence, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is a tangible reminder of her intercession when prayed with.



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3. The Theotokos in the Jesus Prayer

Although the Jesus Prayer, recited with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), focuses on Christ, the Theotokos is implicit in its theology and practice:

- **Mother of the Saviour:** The invocation of "Jesus Christ, Son of God" recognizes Christ as the Incarnate Word, born of Mary. In Orthodox theology, the Theotokos is inseparable from the Incarnation, since its fiat (Luke 1:38) allowed the Son of God to become man. Each repetition of Jesus' Prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is, indirectly, a tribute to the Theotokos, who gave birth to the Savior.
- **Maternal intercession:** The Orthodox believe that the Theotokos intercedes for those who pray, especially when they invoke the name of her Son. In hesychast practice, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is used to seek the mercy of Christ, and the Theotokos is seen as a mediator who presents these prayers before His Son. **St. Nectarius of Aegina**, for example, promoted devotion to Mary in his monastery, and his nuns used the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as part of their prayer life, relying on the intercession of the Theotokos.
- **Trinitarian Theology:** As explored above, the Jesus Prayer is a Trinitarian act that invokes the Son, in relation to the Father, and is sustained by the Holy Spirit. The Theotokos, like the one who received the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation (Luke 1:35) and gave birth to the Son, is intimately linked to the Trinity. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), in facilitating this Trinitarian prayer, indirectly honors Mary as the "Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit," according to Orthodox liturgical expressions.



4. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the spiritual struggle with the Theotokos

In the fight against the demon, the Theotokos plays a crucial role, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) becomes a means of invoking his protection:

- **Protector against the devil:** The Theotokos is revered as the "Conqueror of the demons" in the Orthodox tradition, since her obedience undid Eve's sin and allowed the defeat of the evil one by Christ (Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and hers"). The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), used to recite the Jesus Prayer, is associated with the intercession of Mary, who helps believers resist temptations. **St. Païos of Mount Athos** taught that devotion to the Theotokos, combined with the use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ), is a powerful defense against the devil.
- **Icons and prayer:** In many monasteries, monks pray the Jesus Prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) in front of icons of the Theotokos, such as the **Panagia Portaitissa** (Guardian of the Gate) on Mount Athos. These icons reinforce Mary's presence as a protective mother, and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) acts as a physical link to this devotion.
- **Marian Hymns:** In monastic practice, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is sometimes used to recite Marian hymns, such as the **Akathistos** to the Theotokos or the supplication "Under your protection" (*Yperagia Theotokos*). These prayers, though less common than the Jesus Prayer, strengthen the connection between the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and Mary's intercession against the forces of evil.

5. Liturgical and monastic practices



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The Theotokos is present in Orthodox liturgical life, which complements the use of Chotki (ЧОТКИ):

- **Liturgy and Chotki (ЧОТКИ)** : The Orthodox liturgy is full of references to the Theotokos, as in the hymn **Axion Estin** ("It is worthy of truth") which praises it as "more honorable than the cherubim". The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), used outside the liturgy, extends this Marian devotion to daily life, allowing the faithful to honor Mary while praying to her Son. **St. Basil the Great**, in structuring monastic life, included Marian prayers that later monks combined with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ).
- **Marian feasts**: During the feasts of the Theotokos, such as the **Annunciation** (March 25) or the **Dormition** (August 15), monks and lay people intensify the use of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), dedicating prayers to Mary as intercessor. On Mount Athos, Marian vigils often include the recitation of the Jesus Prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), uniting devotion to Christ and his Mother.
- **Marian monasteries**: **St. Nectarius of Aegina**, whose monastery is dedicated to the Holy Trinity, also fostered devotion to the Theotokos. The nuns of Aegina use the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) as part of their prayer rule, trusting in Mary's protection, especially in times of difficulty.

6. Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and Theotokos in modern life

In the modern context, the relationship between the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Theotokos is still relevant:

- **Popular devotion**: Orthodox laity, inspired by figures such as **St. Paios**, often wear Chotki (ЧОТКИ) blessed at Marian shrines, such as the Dormition Monastery in Tinos, Greece, believing that the Theotokos protects them through this practice. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) becomes a symbol of Mary's maternal intercession in daily life.



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- **Comfort in adversity:** The Theotokos is seen as the "Mother of the Afflicted," and the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), used to pray in times of crisis (illness, loss, anxiety), is a means of seeking her comfort. St. Paisios recounted stories of miracles where prayer with the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), offered under the protection of Mary, brought spiritual and physical relief.
- **Bridge with the rosary:** In ecumenical contexts, some Orthodox and Catholics see parallels between the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) and the Catholic rosary, which is dedicated to Mary. Although the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) focuses on the Jesus Prayer, its use may include Marian supplications, reinforcing devotion to the Theotokos as the mother of Christ.

7. Connection with the Holy Trinity

The relationship of the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to the Theotokos is enriched by its Trinitarian dimension, as previously explored:

- **Mary as the door of the Trinity:** The Theotokos is venerated as the means by which the Son entered the world, guided by the Holy Spirit and in obedience to the Father. The Chotki (ЧОТКИ), by facilitating the Jesus Prayer, honors Christ and, by extension, Mary, whose life reflects Trinitarian communion.
- **Trinitarian intercession:** When the faithful use the Chotki (ЧОТКИ), they trust that the Theotokos presents their prayers before the Trinity, amplifying their plea for mercy. This belief is rooted in Orthodox hymns such as the **Paraklesis**, which exalts Mary as mediator before her Son.

The Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is deeply linked to the **Most Holy Theotokos** in the Orthodox tradition through its symbolism, the legends that associate it with Mary, its role in hesychast prayer, and its use in spiritual struggle. As the mother of Christ, the Theotokos is an implicit presence in the



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Jesus Prayer, and her intercession strengthens the faithful who use the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) to seek divine mercy and resist the devil. Saints such as **St. Basil, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Nectarius, and St. Paisios** have promoted practices that integrate Marian devotion with Chotki (ЧОТКИ), especially on Mount Athos and Marian monasteries. In modern life, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) remains a reminder of the protection and maternal love of the Theotokos, uniting believers with the Holy Trinity through constant prayer and humility. Thus, the Chotki (ЧОТКИ) is not only a spiritual weapon and a means for theosis, but also a bond with the Mother of God, who guides her children to her Son and Savior.

The Man of Prayer and Spiritual Struggle in Our Time

We live in a time when Christians face many challenges in remaining faithful to the Gospel. The rapidity of cultural changes, the constant spread of new ideas, and increasing secularization test the steadfastness of those who desire to follow Christ.

The Orthodox Church teaches that the true combat of the Christian is not against other people, but against sin, passions and everything that separates man from God. As the holy Apostle Paul writes:

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places."
(Ephesians 6:12).

Therefore, the enemy of the Christian is not his neighbor, whatever his condition or way of life, but sin and spiritual deception.

The confusion of our time

Contemporary society often proposes an understanding of the human person different from that taught by Sacred Scripture and handed down by Holy Tradition. In various areas, conceptions of gender, sexuality and identity are promoted that many Orthodox Churches consider incompatible with Christian anthropology.

The Church proclaims, according to the Book of Genesis:



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**"And God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."
(Genesis 1:27).**

From this perspective, the difference between male and female is part of God's creative plan and has a spiritual significance. At the same time, the Church affirms that every person is created in the image of God and deserves to be treated with respect, compassion, and love, even when there are deep disagreements on moral or anthropological issues.

The Man Who Prays with the Chatki

In front of the noise of the world stands the man who humbly holds his Чóтки (Hutki).

While society often invites us to seek our own identity in changing criteria or in the approval of others, the Christian seeks his identity in Christ.

Every knot traveled with the Jesus Prayer strengthens the soul against despair, pride, anger, and all passion. The humble repetition of the Holy Name reminds us that true transformation begins in the heart.

The man of prayer need not respond to confusion with violence, contempt, or insults. His first task is to overcome sin itself.

The real resistance

Christian endurance is not only about rejecting errors, but about living according to the Gospel.

Whoever prays with the Chótki seeks:

- to preserve the purity of the heart;
- to keep inner peace;
- to speak truthfully and charitably;
- to control the passions;
- practice daily repentance;
- to remain faithful to the teaching of the Church.



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Firmness in faith and love of neighbor are not mutually exclusive, but mutually supportive.

Prayer as a spiritual weapon

The Holy Fathers teach that the greatest victory over evil begins when man learns to say attentively:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

This prayer frees the Christian from the illusion that the world's ills can be solved only through debate or confrontation. Before correcting the world, the believer is called to become himself.

Standing Firm

The Christian must preserve the apostolic faith without being ashamed of it, even if his convictions are unpopular. However, such fidelity must never become a reason to despise or dehumanize those who think or live differently.

Christ commands us to tell the truth, but also to love our neighbor. The two commandments are not opposed.

The man who carries the Chatki in his hand is constantly reminded that judgment belongs to God, while it is up to him to live in holiness, to bear witness to the Gospel, and to pray for the salvation of all.

Thus, in the midst of the tensions of our time, the Christian remains firm not by the force of his opinions, but by the grace of God, repeating incessantly:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."



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About the Author



His Most Reverend Excellency +Basilio, born in Santiago de Chile, in a papist family, was baptized and educated in the faith by his grandparents.

His primary education was in American schools in Santiago, where he learned English, his secondary education was in a high school where he graduated and then entered university. He works as a solicitor in public companies for a while and realizes that this is not what God wants for him, so he begins to work in Computer

Science, managing to climb positions and become Technology Manager at Marriott Chile, at the age of 29 he decides to seek the way of God and enters the monastic life in the Benedictine Monastery of Lliu-Lliu, after studying theology, he becomes disillusioned with the church because of what he has to live and see, he returns to work in Technology once again achieving management positions and decides to return to the path of faith and seeks to be accepted into the Holy Orthodox Church, receiving Holy Baptism with the name of Basil, he studies Orthodox Theology and is ordained as a deacon and later receives the monastic tonsure and priestly ordination, after several years he receives the Grand Scheme and is made Archimandrite.

On January 13, 2020, according to the ancient calendar, he was ordained Bishop of Santiago and all of Chile.

On February 13, 2025, he was enthroned as Metropolitan Archbishop of Santiago and all of Chile.

He currently lives in solitude in the Skete San Basilio of which he is Abbot in Curacavi, Metropolitan Region, Chile and dedicates his life to prayer, to show the beauty of the Holy Orthodox Church and to Spiritual Direction.