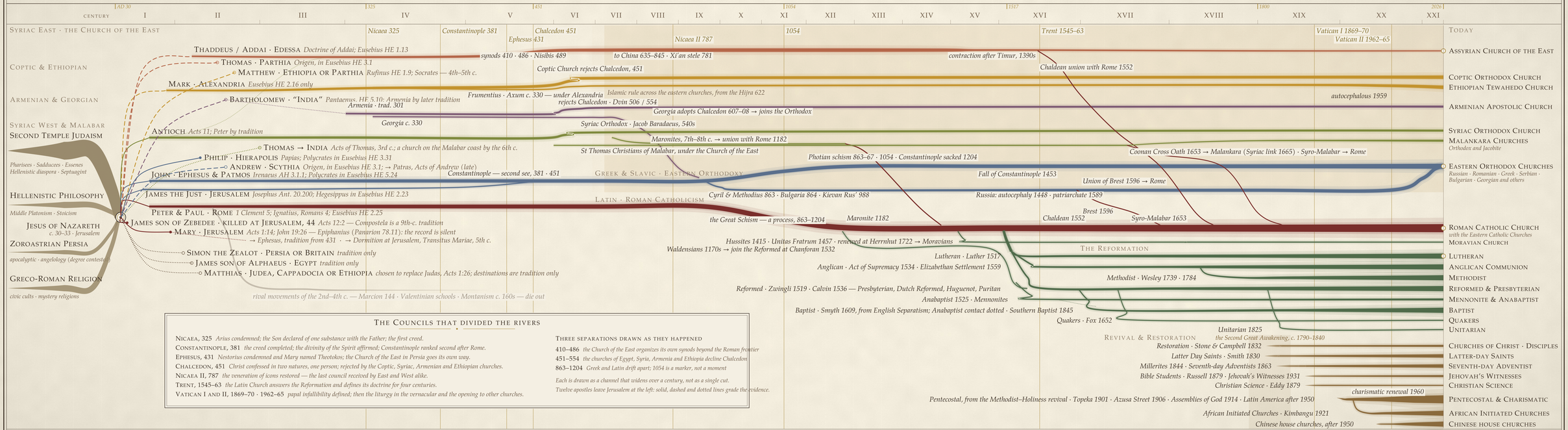
THE RIVERS OF CHRISTENDOM

Historical Chart of the Development of Christian Traditions, c. 30–2026

Researched and created by Alex Lucio



The Councils that divided the rivers

- **Nicaea, 325** — *Arius condemned; the Son declared of one substance with the Father; the first creed.*
- **Constantinople, 381** — *the creed completed; the divinity of the Spirit affirmed; Constantinople ranked second after Rome.*
- **Ephesus, 431** — *Nestorius condemned and Mary named Theotokos; the Church of the East in Persia goes its own way.*
- **Chalcedon, 451** — *Christ confessed in two natures, one person; rejected by the Coptic, Syriac, Armenian and Ethiopian churches.*
- **Nicaea II, 787** — *the veneration of icons restored — the last council received by East and West alike.*
- **Trent, 1545–63** — *the Latin Church answers the Reformation and defines its doctrine for four centuries.*
- **Vatican I and II, 1869–70 · 1962–65** — *papal infallibility defined; then the liturgy in the vernacular and the opening to other churches.*

Three separations drawn as they happened

- **410–486** — *the Church of the East organizes its own synods beyond the Roman frontier*
- **451–554** — *the churches of Egypt, Syria, Armenia and Ethiopia decline Chalcedon*
- **863–1204** — *Greek and Latin drift apart; 1054 is a marker, not a moment*

Each is drawn as a channel that widens over a century, not as a single cut.
Twelve apostles leave Jerusalem at the left: solid, dashed and dotted lines grade the evidence.

Key to the lines

- ——— *early, independent attestation*
- – – – *serious tradition of the 3rd–4th c.*
- ····· *later tradition only*

Width of a river today

- *over 250 million*
- *50–250 million*
- *10–50 million*
- *1–10 million*
- *under 1 million*

Reading the chart

Time runs left to right; the scale changes at the gold ticks in the century strip so that the eventful centuries have room. A river keeps a straight course and bends only at an event. Separations open gradually, as they did; churches that returned to Rome are drawn as tributaries; rivers that fade into the paper died out. Dates marked "trad." or "c." are conventional, not documented. Where a church's account of its own origin differs from the historical record, the record is drawn and the account is noted. Gold rings: reconciling declarations of 1965, 1994 and 1999.

Principal sources

Acts of the Apostles · Josephus, Antiquities 20 · 1 Clement · Ignatius of Antioch · Irenaeus, Against Heresies · Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History
Epiphanius, Panarion · Rufinus and Socrates · Synodicon Orientale · the Xi'an stele · the acts of the councils · the synods of Dvin · Acts of Thomas
Doctrine of Addai · Transitus Mariae · Humbert's bull of 1054 · the statutes and confessions of the Reformation. Present-day sizes follow
World Christian Database and Pew Research estimates of the 2020s; the five width classes are approximate.

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