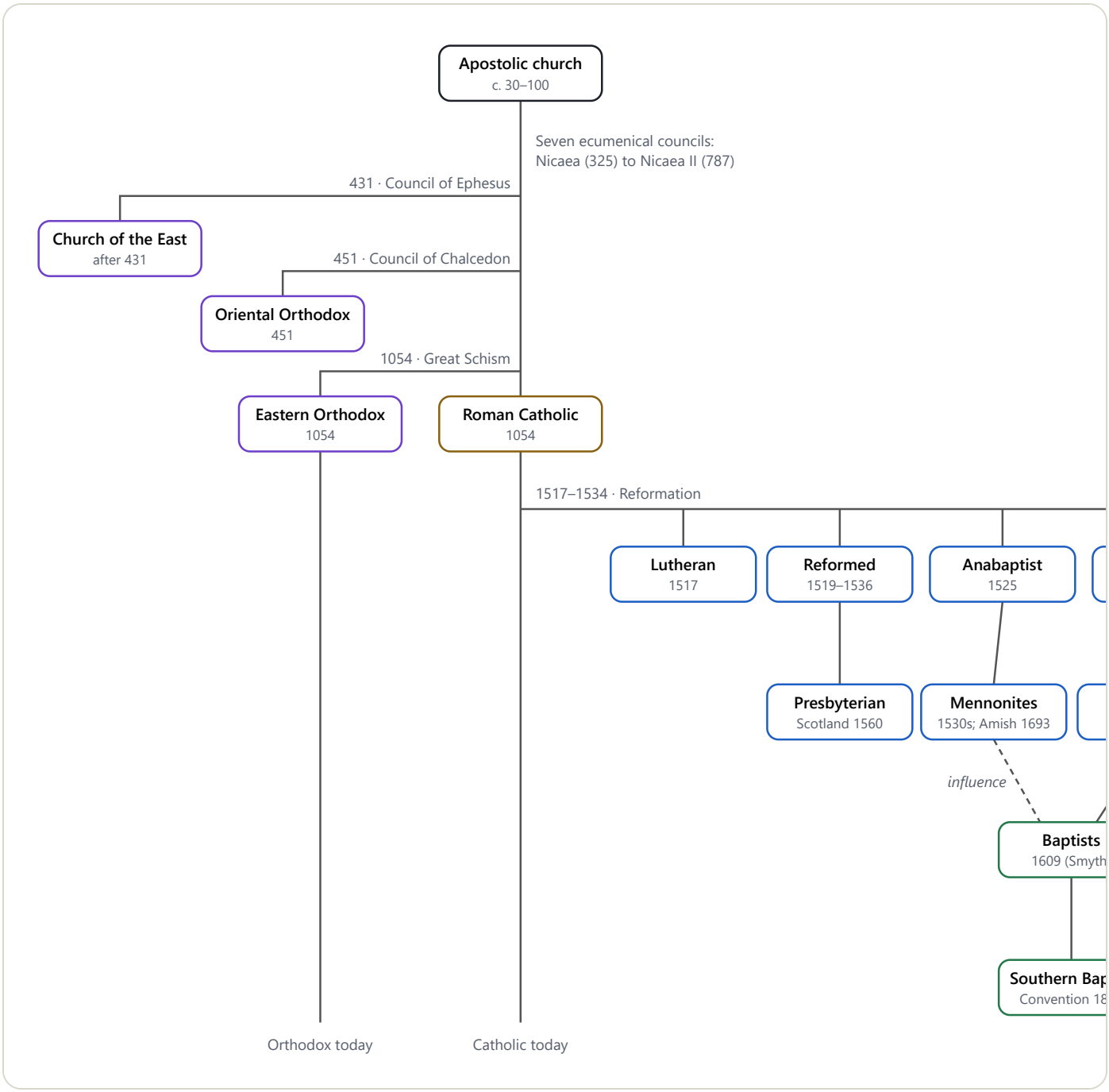
38. Family tree of Christian traditions

A simplified map of the major divisions from the apostolic church to today. Solid lines show institutional descent; the dashed line shows influence. Scroll sideways on a narrow screen.



- **Church of the East** (Assyrian): did not accept the Council of Ephesus (431). **Oriental Orthodox** (Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Syriac, Eritrean, Malankara): did not accept Chalcedon (451). Both keep bishops, the sacraments and the veneration of saints, which Catholics and Orthodox cite as evidence that these practices are older than the later disputes over Rome's claims.

- **Eastern Catholic churches** (Ukrainian, Maronite, Melkite and others) are in communion with Rome but follow Eastern liturgies; several came from Orthodox bodies that reunited with Rome (e.g., Union of Brest, 1596).
- **Baptists** began among English Separatists in exile: John Smyth's congregation in Amsterdam (1609), Thomas Helwys's church in London (1612), and the Calvinist Particular Baptists (1630s). Contact with Dutch Mennonites influenced the General Baptists, but most historians see Baptists as English Puritan Separatists rather than descendants of the Anabaptists.

Across the traditions

How each major tradition tells the story of its own origins, from its own documents.

Catholic

Catholics hold that Christ gave his community a lasting structure, beginning with the Twelve with Peter at their head (CCC 765). The one Church of Christ, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, "subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter" and by the bishops in communion with him (Lumen Gentium 8; CCC 816). Later communities separated from full communion, "often enough" with blame on both sides, and many elements of sanctification and truth exist outside her visible structure (LG 8; CCC 817).

Sources: Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium (1964) 8 (vatican.va); Catechism of the Catholic Church 765 (vatican.va __P27.HTM), 816, 817 (__P29.HTM).

Orthodox

The Orthodox Church understands itself as "the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church" (Crete 2016, "Relations" 1), which has kept the faith received from the Fathers "unchanged and uncontaminate" (Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, 1848, §20). On this view the West departed, not the East: the Encyclical calls the Filioque a new doctrine and the papacy a heresy, and says the West introduced novelties (§§4–6, 16). Crete accepts other bodies' "historical name" while tying relations to clarifying their ecclesiology ("Relations" 6); Antioch, Russia, Bulgaria and Georgia did not attend that council.

Sources: Holy and Great Council (Crete 2016), Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, §§1, 6 (orthodoxcouncil.org); Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848), §§4, 5, 6, 16, 20 (orthodoxinfo.com); OCA News, "Holy and Great Council concludes on the Sunday of All Saints" (26 June 2016), on the four absent churches.

Lutheran

Lutherans do not see their churches as a new foundation but as the catholic church cleansed

Reformed

Reformed churches confess one catholic church that "has existed from the beginning of the

of recent abuses. The Augsburg Confession (1530) teaches that "one holy Church is to continue forever" (Art. VII) and closes its doctrinal articles by claiming there is "nothing that varies from the Scriptures, or from the Church Catholic," or from Rome as known from its writers (conclusion of Part I). Continuity and unity rest on agreement in the gospel rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered, not on uniform human ceremonies (Art. VII).

Sources: Augsburg Confession (1530), Art. VII; conclusion of Part I (end of Art. XXI) (bookofconcord.org, Bente/Dau translation).

world," so the Reformation restored that church rather than founding another (Belgic Confession 27; Second Helvetic Confession 17). The true church is known by its marks, not by succession: "the pure preaching of the gospel," the pure administration of the sacraments and church discipline, while a false church "assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God" (Belgic 29). The Second Helvetic Confession denies that only the Roman Church is catholic (ch. 17).

Sources: Belgic Confession (1561), Arts. 27, 28, 29 (RCA/CRC translation, rca.org); Second Helvetic Confession (1566), ch. XVII (ccel.org).

Anglican

Anglicans regard the Church of England as the ancient church of the English, reformed rather than newly founded: it "belongs to the true and apostolic Church of Christ" (Canon A1). It kept the threefold ministry, holding that "from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders" of bishops, priests and deacons (Preface to the Ordinal), while rejecting the Bishop of Rome's jurisdiction (Article XXXVII) and asserting a national church's authority over its own ceremonies (Article XXXIV). The 1662 Preface speaks of keeping "the mean" between refusing all change and admitting change too easily.

Sources: Canons of the Church of England, Canon A1 (churchofengland.org); Book of Common Prayer (1662), Preface, and Preface to the Ordinal (churchofengland.org); Thirty-Nine Articles, XXXIV, XXXVII (churchofengland.org).

Methodist

Methodists trace their origin to an eighteenth-century revival inside the Church of England. Wesley's Minutes state that God's design was "Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church" (Large Minutes, Q. 3), and his *Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England* (1758) argued against leaving it. After American independence, with no bishops or parish ministers there, Wesley provided ordained ministers and superintendents in 1784, writing that American Methodists were "now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."

Sources: John Wesley, Minutes of Several Conversations ("Large Minutes," 1789 ed.), Q. 3 (Wesley Corpus, corpus.historyofmethodism.com); Wesley, Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England (1758), Reasons 1, 12 and Part III (anglicanhistory.org); Wesley, letter "To 'Our Brethren in America'," Bristol, 10 September 1784 (wesley.nnu.edu, Letters 1784b).

Baptist

Baptists claim continuity with the New Testament in faith and order, not institutional descent; a church is “an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers” (Baptist Faith and Message 2000, art. VI). Most Baptist historians hold that Baptists “emerged out of the Puritan-Separatist movement,” beginning in Amsterdam in 1608/09 (McBeth); the Baptist World Alliance marked the 400th anniversary in 2009. Landmark successionists such as J. M. Carroll (*The Trail of Blood*, 1931) instead trace churches “never in any way connected with the Catholic Church” to apostolic times, while denying apostolic succession.

Sources: Baptist Faith and Message (2000), art. VI (bfm.sbc.net); H. Leon McBeth, “Baptist Beginnings” (Baptist History and Heritage Society pamphlet; opened as a 2007 web reprint); Baptist World Alliance General Council Resolution 2009.1, “Appreciation” (baptistworld.org); J. M. Carroll, The Trail of Blood (1931), introduction and “Some After Words” §1 (SermonIndex edition).

Outside these traditions: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, founded in 1830, regards itself as a restoration of the original church rather than a branch of this tree; see Latter-day Saints and historic Christianity.

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