

What is the oldest Christian denomination?

I have been taught and always considered the Catholic faith to be the oldest existing "denomination" going back to Jesus Himself. My daughter tells me that the Orthodox faith is older. Who is right?

In one sense it's a tie, because the Eastern Orthodox and Catholics both trace their origins to the Apostles. The fact is, in the early centuries of the Church, there wasn't an Eastern Orthodoxy apart from the Catholic Church.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches to this day claim to be the true Church and to teach the orthodox faith. This claim, however, cannot be sustained historically, since it is clear that the Eastern patriarchates (following that of Constantinople) broke away from the See of Rome by the end of the 12th century (for alleged "heresies") and then went on to repudiate the Councils of Lyons (1274) and Florence (1439), wherein the leaders of the Eastern Churches acknowledged the divine institution of the papacy and repudiated their error on the procession of the Holy Spirit.

There can be no question, moreover, that the supreme authority in the Church of the Successor of Peter was acknowledged from the earliest days of the Church and admitted by the Fathers, saints, ecumenical councils, and Popes of the first millennium.

Christ established one visible Church which is not a "denomination." Christ said He would build His Church, not Churches. A visible Church must have a visible head and center of unity. It did for 12 centuries and still does. Lacking a visible head and supreme authority which bonds all the patriarchs and bishops in one indivisible Catholic unity, the separated Orthodox (actually it is we Catholics who maintain the ancient orthodoxy) have no answer to the key question: When patriarchs and bishops disagree on matters of dogma, how can the ordinary person determine which group represents the Orthodox faith?

For Catholics, the answer is simple: In the words of St. Ambrose in the 4th century, "Where Peter is, there is the Church." The Pope is the heir of Peter in his primacy of universal authority which is affirmed in both Tradition and Scripture. Does not Scripture testify to Peter being made by Christ the Rock-foundation of the Church (Matthew 16:18); the Holder of the Keys of the Kingdom (the Keys are the symbol of supreme authority (Matthew 16:19); the Confirmer of the faith of his brethren (Luke 22:31-32); and Chief Pastor of all the lambs and sheep of Christ (John 21:15-17)?

We see, then, that the visible Church was given in Peter its visible head and supreme authority and chief pastor, constituting an office that was essential to the hierarchical structure of the Church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. That office continues in the Successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome, who, in the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 109 A.D.) "having the presidency of love" that is the Catholic Church.

The [website](#) of a convert from Greek Orthodoxy, James Likoudis, has more information on this topic, as well as information on additional books and resources.