

When and why did our church become the “Roman” Catholic Church instead of just the Catholic Church? And secondly, at the time when several popes ruled from Avignon, France, were we, at the time, known as the “Avignon” Catholic Church?

I don't think this question was intended to be a trick question, but it turns out that it is. After some research I found that we are not now, nor have we ever been, the Roman Catholic Church. It was news to me. We are the Catholic Church; or sometimes we refer to ourselves simply as the Church. In all the documents from the Second Vatican Council, and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, you will never find the term “Roman Catholic Church”.

There are many different particular Churches that belong to the Catholic Church. There are over 20 Eastern Rite Churches and then, in the West there is the Latin, or Roman, Rite Church. We are all one Catholic Church, all in union with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.

The Church does not officially refer to herself as the Roman Catholic Church, but the expression came into use by others in the 16th or 17th century. It was originally an expression of condescension, but has now taken on common, although incorrect, usage. It appears that it may have been introduced by Anglicans who argued for their own identity and validity saying that the Church was made of three branches: Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic.

For those with internet access who would like a more complete discussion of this topic, I would suggest an article by Kenneth Whitehead which can be found at: <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/churb3.htm>.

Deacon Joe