



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 3, 2011

BBC Criticized for Dropping B.C. and A.D.

The UK's BBC media giant has found itself in the middle of a cultural conflict after its decision to drop the use of the traditional Christ-centered dating method which uses the initials B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini, or Year of the Lord), replacing them with the secular terms B.C.E. (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) in many television and radio broadcasts.



In an official statement the BBC explained that because it is "committed to impartiality, it is appropriate that we use terms that do not offend or alienate non-Christians." The broadcaster said that B.C.E. and C.E. represented a "religiously neutral alternative to B.C./A.D."

The *Washington Post* reported that the move "drew immediate accusations that the network was guilty of political correctness run amok as the BBC's phone lines were jammed with irate listeners and readers." Some critics pointed out that the new method still used Christ's birth as a historical reference point.

One British evangelical leader, retired Anglican Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali (pictured above), told the British press that the change "amounts to the dumbing down of the Christian basis of our culture, language, and history. These changes are unnecessary, and they don't actually achieve what the BBC wants them to achieve. Whether you use Common Era or Anno Domini, the date is still the same and the reference point is still the birth of Jesus Christ."

A spokeswoman for the country's [Plain English Society](#), which conducts an ongoing campaign against "gobbledygook, jargon and misleading public information" (according to its website), said the new BBC policy "sounds like change just for the sake of change.... It is difficult to see what the point of the changes [is] if people do not understand the new terms."

The UK's *Daily Mail* newspaper noted that the BBC's [Religion and Ethics site](#) is headed by BBC editor Aaqil Ahmed, who is a Muslim, and "is littered with references to Common Era and Before Common Era. However, the BBC bizarrely insists the [bbc.co.uk/religion](#) website has nothing to do with Mr. Ahmed and is actually the responsibility of BBC Learning."

According to the UK news site [TheDrum.co.uk](#), Ahmed insisted that the BBC had not issued an outright ban on the use of the terms B.C. and A.D. "We have issued no editorial guidelines or instructions to suggest that anyone in the BBC should change the terms they use," Ahmed claimed. "The BBC, like most people, use B.C. and A.D. as standard terminology." Nonetheless, he added, "we recognize that it is possible to use different terminology, and that some people do: that is what is reflected on our Religion website."



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The *Daily Mail*, which had initially reported the story, noted that more than a little confusion has been generated with the new policy, because BBC coverage includes both the old and the new references — sometimes within the same story. For example, noted the paper, a “report on historic monuments in Jerusalem ... informed viewers that Temple Mount, a shrine which is sacred to both Jews and Muslims, was built in ‘70 AD (the Common Era),’ while a recent report on frankincense quoted one reference to 7000 BC before describing another event as taking place in the 1st Century BCE.”

The UK’s Christian leaders largely condemned the move as an effort to discount the importance of the Christian faith in British culture. The Rev. Peter Mullen, Anglican chaplain to the London Stock Exchange, called the change little more than “absurd political correctness,” telling the *Daily Mail*: “I think it’s an example of the BBC trying to undermine Christianity by pushing an aggressive secularism. I would be very surprised if any other faith had complained about the use of Anno Domini and Before Christ.”

And Ann Widdecombe, a Catholic former British [Conservative Party](#) political leader, charged that “what the BBC is doing is offensive to Christians. They are discarding terms that have been around for centuries and are well understood by everyone. What are they going to do next? Get rid of the entire calendar on the basis that it has its roots in Christianity?”

One well-known BBC commentator, [John Humphrys](#), who hosts the *Today* program on BBC’s [Radio 4](#) network, said that he would disregard the updated terminology. “I will continue to use A.D. and B.C. because I don’t see a problem,” he said. “They are terms which most people use and are clearly understood.”



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