

II. CHURCH BEGINNINGS

Information page on the calendar, the making of dates:

Unified time systems such as we now use were not well understood or identified in past ages. Most societies used a lunar calendar calling for the insertion of a given month from time to time although the Egyptians identified a year that consisted of 365 and 1/4 days per year. The actual dating of things was often dependent on such things as "the first year of the proconsul" or "in the year of Emperor.." Much of the dating in Rome was set from the founding of the city (AUC..ab urbe condita) which, by most modern reckonings was 754 BC.

Caesar stabilized the Roman calendar in 45 BC'--the month of July is named for him--and used the Egyptian year concept with a leap year every fourth year. The calendar was appropriately known as the "Julian" calendar. Working with this, Varro, an early Christian chronographer recalculated the date of Rome's founding to 753 BC. In the meantime, some parts of western civilization followed the Greek olympian calculations for a given year and the Hebrew community had its own calendar based on the first of the month Tishri is 3761 BC.

A Christian monk, Dionysius, about 525 AD worked with the Julian calendar and devised the idea of identifying things AD (ab incarnatione Domine) for all events since the birth of Christ, and "ab origino mundi" for all events before. The latter designation did not catch on but the term "BC" (before Christ) became common and the Hebrew community adopted the term "BCE", "before the common era."

The Julian calendar missed about 11 minutes a year and this meant that in time it was out of synch with the moon, etc. A revision] of this was made in the days of Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585) that brought the calendar up to date and his work is known as the Gregorian calendar...in use today. It took protestants a while to accept this work..but it became standardized in much of the western world.

If you want to read more widely and more accurately on this subject,. Volume 113 in the Twentieth Century Encyclopaedia of Catholicism will prove very interesting and informative. And if you wonder why some of our dates in a course like this are not always exact..this calendrical study is intended to tell you why.