



# BeWeb. The cross portal of cultural ecclesiastical heritage

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Italian Dioceses and ecclesiastical cultural institutions - archives, libraries and museums - are engaged in the census and in the description of the cultural heritage which belongs to them. A commitment promoted, supported, and coordinated by the National Office for the Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage (UNBCE) of the Italian Catholic Bishops' Conference (CEI), which covers the historical and artistic (Santi; D'Agnelli and Gavazzi, "Catalogazione, riordino, inventariazione e censimento: strumenti informatici e nuove tecnologie al servizio dei beni culturali"; "Inventariazione informatizzata dei beni storici e artistici mobili delle diocesi italiane"), architectural (Gavazzi), archival (Silvestri, "Informatizzazione degli archivi ecclesiastici: programmi ad uso locale e ipotesi di un sistema integrato"; D'Agnelli, Di Sante, and Rizzo; D'Agnelli, "Dall'adesione delle diocesi emiliano romagnole al progetto CEI-Ar alla proposta per la guida agli istituti culturali ecclesiastici di conservazione: partecipare e concorrere al Progetto Culturale della Chiesa italiana"; "CEI-Ar: un progetto di riordino e descrizione degli archivi storici a servizio della comunità ecclesiale"), and library heritage (Corbosiero and Di Sante; D'Agnelli and Tichetti; D'Agnelli, "Biblioteche ecclesiastiche tra Polo SBN (PBE) e Anagrafe degli Istituti culturali (AICE): l'affermarsi di un'identità aperta a nuove sfide"; Belfiore and Tichetti), as well as



conservation institutions (Russo; Caffo).

Some features of these projects are common. Everyone agrees that sustainability implemented by the particular Churches is a priority, as the latter are responsible for the protection and preservation of their own heritage. At the same time, the highest attention has been dedicated to the standards and their evolution, as well as to the consistency with similar initiatives promoted by the Ministry of National Heritage, Cultural Activities, and Tourism, and by equivalent international bodies.

This is an unprecedented initiative in the context of the Italian Catholic Church. It includes: 3,551,910 index cards accompanied by images of our historical and artistic heritage; 5,510 catalogued and photographed churches on a total of 63,885 churches counted in the list; over 500 meticulously detailed archives; 414,593 bibliographical records; 1,425 descriptions of archives, libraries, and museums. All this has prompted the local players to take action to ensure a more and more consistent and orderly organization of our diocesan offices for cultural heritage and the conservation institutions, by forming high-skilled and specialized working groups, with the aim of meeting scientifically and effectively the requirements originated by the systematic survey of our heritage.

The census is an indispensable tool to provide an initial knowledge of goods, to favor their accurate management, to enable the planning of the interventions as well as a qualification, or requalification, as objects of worship and culture, memory, and testimony, of the history of the Catholic communities which have commissioned, desired, and protected these goods. The inventory is the most immediate way to give back the heritage to the community and the community to the heritage. The first safeguard is a fruit of the sense of belonging which is perceived, of the certainty of the common cultural and worship-related roots, and of the identifica-

tion of a common identity profile which is reflected in our heritage as a most prominent and accomplished expression of the Catholic Church. Qualifying this heritage, which is somewhat different than giving value to it, corresponds to increasingly integrating it into the ordinary pastoral plans, thus contributing with conviction and determination to the cultural project of the Church. Such a vision requires appropriate tools, technologically up to date, open to dialogue with other systems, easy to use and flexible in their ability to adapt to the needs of research and to scientific and pastoral qualification.

BeWeb - Ecclesiastical heritage in the Web<sup>1</sup> seeks to respond to all these needs by becoming a manifestation of a Church which is open and in dialogue, in osmotic relationship with the reality surrounding her, jealous and proud of her past as much as committed to live the joy of today and tomorrow. The past is in the service of the future, the Church teaches from her own experience. And her experience is also made of paintings and statues, churches and chapels, documents and books (Caputo, "Nuove tecnologie risorsa per la comunità ecclesiale"; Caputo, Poggetti, and Tomasi; Caputo, "Il portale dei beni culturali ecclesiastici BeWeB"; Weston).

BeWeb is the cross portal that internally integrates and connects the inventory of the historical and artistic heritage, the census of worship-allocated buildings, the reorganization and the description of historical archives, the cataloguing of library materials, and the description of cultural institutions. BeWeb presents to all the Web users these goods and their containers; the portals of each sector allow, as a form of integration, for the access to dedicated services (Silvestri, "Verso un portale per gli archivi storici ecclesiastici"). At this moment in time our historical, artistic, and architectural heritage, as well as our cultural institutions are already available online. By 2014, very likely, the portal will also include our archival and library

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.chiesacattolica.it/beweb>.

heritage.

The first choice applied on the inventories for publication in BeWeb is simplification. The specialized language of inventories (which meets standards and vocabularies of the sector) has been "translated" into a fluent language with comprehensible labels and a friendly display of information, in the aim of reaching even the less experienced consumers and be able to address if not everyone, at least many. For this purpose some organization-related pieces of information have been deliberately omitted, partly out of considerations relating to the "sensitivity" of data, partly in view of the extremely detailed approach in certain descriptions which lacks of interest for most people, but that the experts concerned may consult by registering on the system.

At the same time we planned for the future an enhancement of data through the integration of information material (index cards, pictures, filmed documents. . .), pathways, and the analysis of cultural, pastoral, and catechetical topics which offer reading suggestions and guide the less experienced users into the databases. A consequence is the not secondary "rapprochement" effect that a wider audience can perceive, which creates empathy with the goods described in the index cards, while it is more difficult to create such empathy with the index cards themselves. And if these themes and pathways can follow the more traditional route connected to the academic milieu and pure research, they can also be a vehicle of knowledge of pastoral and catechetical contents which are not so easy to understand. And of course this, although more easily associated to them, is not only about our historical and artistic heritage but also about churches, documents, and books. To make the users' approach to the portal even easier, a glossary of liturgical terms has been included.

Certainly the most challenging and most important purpose of

BeWeB is to present in a unified and easy-to-consult way all types of ecclesiastical goods, allowing for a cross-domain navigation of databases produced with descriptive standards and specific characteristics of the sector. The identification of the common elements of navigation is the criticality that requires the greatest effort. First, an accurate reflection is currently made on uniform access points for each sector (AF - authority files): people, organizations, families, geographical names, local terms, and uniform titles (Rizzo). This activity requires a rigorous and consistent work of data acquisition in compliance with the standards which have been set but, at the same time, it offers the highest potential and quality in terms of results.

The AFs offer immediately a bridge of dialogue with external systems and open up prospects for interoperability with systems such as VIAF. The natural consequence of the results of this activity is a strengthening of cross-queries among databases. Sustainable research activities among such very different databases have led the BeWeb portal to some possibilities with interesting results. The most immediate results are territorial and chronological research, which are based on intuitive elements for every Web user, such as space-time coordinates. The internal cross-search into databases certainly includes also the most natural and intuitive approach by Web users: a powerful search system specialized for cultural heritage. The results of research are applicable in different modes - lists, gallery, maps, timeline, slideshows – and propose – by using emoticons - different criteria for data reading (e.g. chronological, territorial, or authorial subdivision, and so on) that accompany the user to a better understanding and contextualization of data.

The circle has been closed and we were brought back to the quality of the original inventories which, within BeWeb, can be appreciated in sectorial portals and specific services especially dedicated to

users.

The cataloguing of library materials is the latest project of reorganization and cataloguing of the ecclesiastical heritage promoted and coordinated by the Italian National Office for the Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage. In 2006, a network of ecclesiastical libraries was established, which conveyed in 2010 within the National Library Service, with the name of SBN Center of Ecclesiastical Libraries (PBE).<sup>2</sup> This Center is characterized by a common membership in the Church of institutions that subscribe to it, as extended to the whole Italian territory. The networking players share software tools and methodology. The cataloguing software being used (CEI-Bib, native EOS.Web) is an integrated system that allows for the treatment of different types of documents (old and modern books, periodicals, musical materials...), the organization of the circulation service, and direct dialogue with the National Library Service. Adherence to Italian national standards REICAT / SBN guarantees territorial integration; the adoption of ISBD and Marc21 data format ensure dialogue and the exchange of information with the main bibliographical systems which are used all over the world. For a description of manuscripts we are using Manus online, according to national software and standards as set by the Central Institute for the Single Catalogue and Bibliographic Descriptions (ICCU) of the Ministry of National Heritage, Cultural Activities, and Tourism. The description of the incunabula is implemented in the framework of the International Project Material Evidence in Incunabula (MEI) by using the software provided by the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL), with automatic links to the bibliographical records of the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC) of the British Library. For a description of musical materials and electronic resources we are actively involved in two working sub-groups which had been created within

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.polopbe.it>.

the group of Italian Marc21 users, coordinated by the Library of the Catholic University of Milan; specifically, an internal group of the PBE Center is studying the issues concerning the cataloguing of the liturgical code. For the cataloguing of periodicals we have just taken the very first contacts with the National Collective Archives of Periodicals (ACNP). A particular interest because of the prospects it opens is to be paid to the collaboration which was established in 2011 with the Central National Library of Florence, which led to the creation of the Group for the Growth and Development of the New Subject Catalogue of Religious Terms (Lucarelli; Sverzellati).

Libraries, in their quality of conservation institutions, are described in the Register of Ecclesiastical Cultural Institutions, available on the BeWeB portal, which shows, in addition to libraries, also archives and museums, while maintaining the necessary link between the venue of conservation and the goods being owned.

I am reporting the first results of the methodological reflection that have already found acceptance in the BeWeB and have identified the quality of results as an essential choice, even at the expense of quantity.

Today, BeWeB presents online our historical, architectural, and artistic heritage, as well as our cultural institutions. By 2014, we hope that the portal shall be able to include also archival and library materials. Routes and dedicated pages make us feel closer to the Italian Dioceses and their heritage, their cathedrals and co-cathedrals; one of the special routes, recently introduced, is dedicated to the churches of modern Rome (1945-2005). Our databases - which have been purposely enhanced - provide us with many points of view which enable us to give a fresh look to our cultural heritage. Faster, Smarter and Richer: this is our proposal for reshaping the catalogue, including library materials.

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ABSTRACT: BeWeb – online ecclesiastical cultural heritage – is a project to establish a portal dedicated to the cultural and artistic heritage of the Catholic Church, by providing an integrated view of data regarding churches, the artwork and items of worship they contain, library and archive funds of diocesan and religious institutes, with a special focus on cultural, scientific and pastoral care aspects, in order to provide an authoritative tool for users to know more about these extraordinary assets. Our goal is to share the outcome of all activities carried out by dioceses and ecclesiastical cultural institutes to manage and enhance their cultural and artistic heritage, both through the catalogue – which provides a virtual map of buildings, items, cultural institutes, archives, funds and libraries – and also through content creation, by connecting different resources together and helping users find their way through this wealth of material, in order for them to appreciate aspects related to pastoral care and worship, in addition to history and culture. Integrating this kind of information leads to a clearer perception of the Church's unique cultural heritage, which can be understood only by referring to local contexts that provide users with a fundamental key for interpretation. Currently, BeWeb hosts the data banks of several Italian dioceses' historic and artistic heritage, in addition to fact sheets regarding dioceses and cultural institutes (museums, archives and libraries). Over time, it will be enriched with data banks of architectural heritage, archival funds and library assets, thus becoming a cross-sectoral portal of ecclesiastical cultural heritage with and extraordinary potential. BeWeb engages in dialogue on a 360° radius: this project also includes continuous updates and reflections regarding national and international scenarios, through a semantic web, open data and integration with internationally-

renowned archives such as VIAF, ULAN, TGN. All this is also made possible by the development of access point control and standardization (authority files). BeWeb's aim is to provide for different navigation needs: from average users looking for basic information to specialists engaging in more sophisticated searches. BeWeb acts as a mediator between users and cultural institutions, to enhance the Church's important cultural heritage through greater participation by making communication easier.

**KEYWORDS:** Library catalogue, uniform title, communication techniques, display patterns, discovery systems, users needs.

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