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The Spanish Library Church Union Catalogue: A Success Story

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ABIE, the Spanish Association of Church Librarians

ABIE is the acronym for Asociación Española de Bibliotecarios de la Iglesia (Spanish Association of Church Librarians). There were several attempts to fund the creation of such an association in 1969, 1972, and 1985 (Valle, 2007). The initiative finally succeeded in 1991, and its statutes were approved by the Spanish Bishop Company in 1993.

Since 1997, ABIE has represented Spanish Church Libraries at the Assembly of the European Association of Theological Libraries, which goes by its French acronym, BETH (BETH, 'About us').

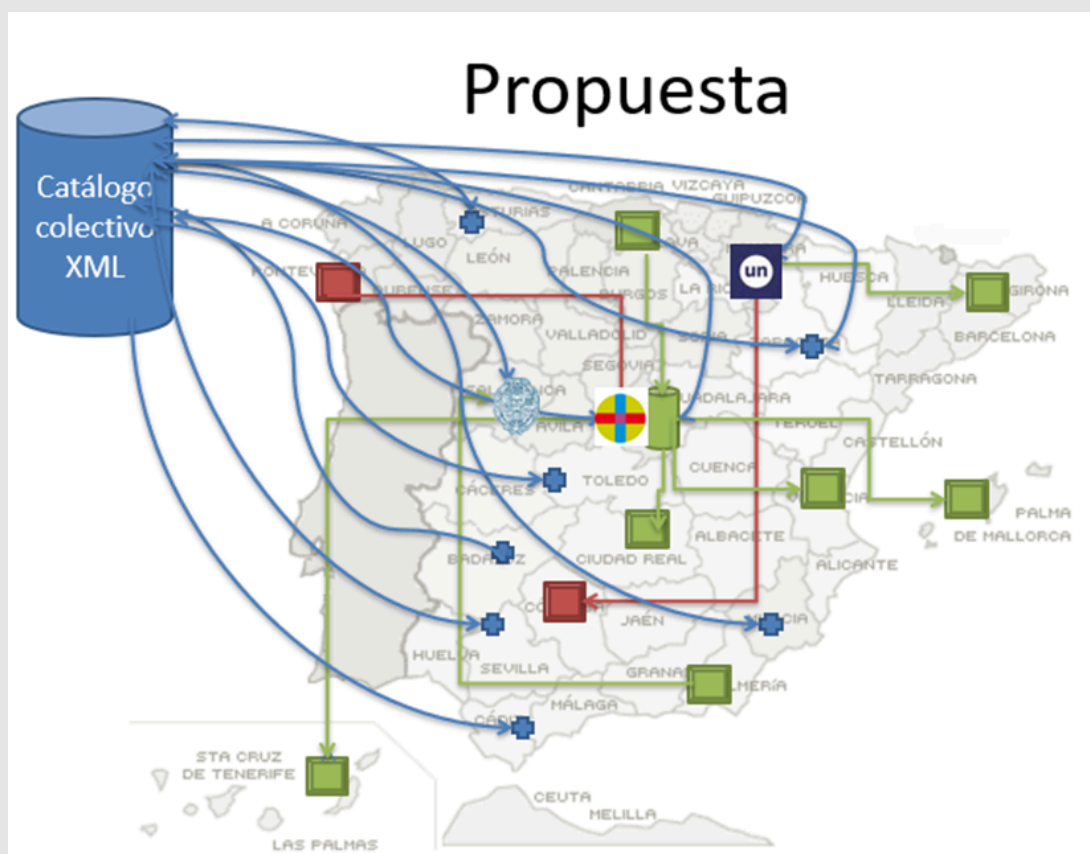
Just like other Spanish Church associations such as those of archivists and museumists, it is necessary to bear in mind that the ABIE is a professional association of people, not libraries. It is therefore challenging to tackle large projects because its members are not always in charge of their libraries, as they are technicians, not directors.

[1] Spanish Association of Church Librarians.

Since its establishment, ABIE's initial objectives have included 'the development of a Theological thesaurus, a union catalogue of books dating from before the 19th century, a union catalogue of ecclesiastical journals, a centralized catalogue of duplicate books and journals, an adaptation of UNESCO's ISIS program for Church Libraries, a biannual newsletter, a basic bibliography of Theology, [and the] design of a website' (Turbett, 2020).

Union Catalogue: A Background

2024 witnessed the launch of a long-awaited project, the ABIE collective catalogue (Cortés-Martínez, 2024). In the past, there had been attempts to create a network of Church libraries or at least a union catalogue (Sanz Santacruz, 2007). The most ambitious initiative was proposed to the Episcopal Conference in 2008 as REDBIE (Red de Bibliotecas de la Iglesia en España: 'Spanish Church Libraries Network'), which sought to create a holistic network of Church libraries (Morillo-Velarde, 2008). The project would establish not only a union catalogue, but also the relevant



[Image 1] The Structure Plan (2008) (Image provided by Fran Cortés)

processes, acquisitions, standards, training, an interlibrary loan system, and the staff required for such an undertaking. Ultimately, the high financial burden of such a project prevented us from finding the right sponsorship to enact it.

In 2022, ABIE returned to this old dream with a different approach. We thought there would be more chances of success if we initially started small. We could then, in time, expand the project by tackling individual objectives such as an interlibrary loan system and the setting of common cataloguing standards.

We were unfortunately unable to persuade the IT Service of the Spanish Episcopal Conference to host the catalogue online. It was therefore likely that we would have to fund this ourselves. Due to these circumstances, we were aware from the outset that the collective catalogue would be a project that would have to be predominantly self-financed. In the following, we examine the chosen model.

Looking for Tools and Companies

It was clear to us from the start that we would be relying on free software to create the platform due to the variety of companies and price ranges to choose from. After deliberating between Koha and Vufind, we opted for the latter because we only needed one platform for the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), where facilities for cataloguing, lending, and acquisition were not needed, and because Vufind is more adept at integrating records from different data sources.

With these basic parameters established, we contacted various Spanish companies that could offer us the installation and configuration of Vufind as well as hosting and maintenance. After meetings with half a dozen companies, we selected the company Xercode to manage our union catalogue.

Why Vufind?

VuFind is developed and maintained by an international community of contributors supported by the Open Library Foundation and generous sponsors such as Villanova University. Over 202 developers have contributed to the project over its entire

history, with fifty-one developers active during 2024. VuFind is a discovery system designed and developed to create search interfaces for all types of content and sources, including:

- Catalogue records
- Content from institutional repositories
- Articles from open-access journals
- Digitised materials from the library
- Websites
- Items available for inter-library loan
- Licensed content (where permitted by providers)
- Other collections and resources (simply by adding the metadata!)

Functionalities

Some of the more interesting functionalities of Vufind are:

- The VuFind® search index is powered by Apache Solr, an open-source search engine, offering great performance
- Basic or advanced search box and refining by facets
- Real-Time Access Catalogue (only for catalogues with OAI)
- User account to save searches, create alerts, and mark favourites
- Persistent URLs
- Multilingual interface
- Integration of different contents/sources
- Exportation of bibliographic reference to Zotero (or others)
- Automatic placement of covers

Integration of Contents and Sources

Through Vufind, our content is not restricted to bibliographic records from libraries. In the case of my university library, we have the option to include electronic books and journals packages, records from our institutional repository, and business news or legislation.

As it is open source, you can modify or add modules to better adapt it to your needs. A wide range of configurable options allows for extensive customisation without the need to rewrite code. Furthermore, access to an active international community of users, as well as a variety of merchant service providers, ensure that you can get support when you need it.

Features

Funding

Incorporation into the Union Catalogue was free for the duration of the first year of the project so that prospective member institutions could try it out and explore its advantages. The financial sustainability of this project is fully sustained by participating libraries. It was decided that each library would contribute to costs according to its capacity. According to internal agreements, there are two price ranges: one for 'big' libraries (mainly university libraries) that pay €800 per year and 'little' libraries that pay only €150. In the case of very small libraries with a fixed catalogue ('dead' libraries), the inclusion of their MARC records is done free of charge. Thus, this is a project based upon mutual support since bigger libraries enable smaller ones to pay a reduced price.

The collective catalogue has been an invaluable opportunity for small libraries that did not previously have the capacity to create an OPAC. Furthermore, each library has its own URL for its records in the union catalogue.

Uploading Records

The chosen model is mixed; an automatic upload by OAI (when available), and manual upload following the model of Rebiun (the Spanish university library net), a union catalogue with quarterly record manual uploads using FTP protocol and a basic deduplication system.

Just as Vufind allows for the integration of other data sources, we do not rule out including records of electronic books, journals, institutional repositories, and so on.

Working Group

A working group has recently been set up to manage the union catalogue. The group has defined an institutional agreement text, agreed to a price policy according to institution size, and set common cataloguing standards.

Setting Up

The first step was to check the library software used by each library to see if they had the OAI-MPH protocol, and to study the MARC records to make a map of the MARC labels used by each institution.

MARC Field Mapping

In the next image, we can see part of a spreadsheet with the name of the library, its library software, whether OAI was available and its URL, formats of the registers, and the URLs of the OPACs.

Nombre de la biblioteca	Sistema de gestión	¿OAI?	Formatos	Volúmenes	¿OPAC?	URL del OPAC
Universidad Loyola - Colectivo		https://colectivo.ulyola.es/OAI/Server?verb=ListRecords&metadataPrefix=marc21				
Universidad Loyola	Librisuite/Vufind	https://catalogo.ulyola.es/	MARC21	65.000	SI	https://catalogo.ulyola.es/
Universidad Loyola - Granada	Librisuite/Vufind	https://catalogo-teologia-granada.ulyola.es/	MARC21	142.417	SI	https://catalogo-teologia-granada.ulyola.es/
Biblioteca de la Universidad Eclesiástica Koha		http://koha-opa.ulyola.es/	MARC21	223.578	SI	https://catalogo.sandamaso.es/
Conferencia Episcopal Española	OdiloTID	NO	MARC21	76.300	SI	https://cee.odilo.es/jopac/
Biblioteca Seminario Metropolitano	Koha	SI	MARC; CSV	20.000	SI	https://www.bibliotecasiglesiadeasturias.es/
Biblioteca Facultad Padre Ossó	Koha	SI	MARC; CSV	5.400	SI	https://www.bibliotecasiglesiadeasturias.es/
Institución Colombina	AbsysNET	NO	MARC 21	33.373	SI	https://opac.icolombina.es/opac/
Red de Bibliotecas Iglesia Navarra (Se Koha)		En construcción	En construcción	91.383	En construcción	http://catalogo.bibliotecasiglesianavarra.es/
Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca	Koha	SI	MARC / CSV / XM	672.396	SI	KOHA.UPSA.ES
Biblioteca Diocesana Córdoba	Koha	http://redbiblio.es/	MARC, CSV, TXT	77.000	SI	http://catalogo.redbiblio.es/
Universidad de Navarra	Innopac	?		1.600.000	SI	https://innopac.unav.es/
Biblioteca Instituto Superior de Teología Koha		http://catalogo.istic.es/	MARC, XML, CSV	68.429	SI	http://catalogo.istic.es/
Universidad de Deusto	Alma	NO	MARC	667.606	SI	https://oceanobiblioteca.deusto.es/primario
Comillas	AbsysNET	SI	MARC21	630.000	SI	https://biblioteca.comillas.edu/digital/abrir
Biblioteca Diocesana Bilbao	AbsysNET	NO	Marc21, MarcXM	65.404	SI	biblioteca.bizkeliza.org/opac

[Image 2] Example of MARC Field Mapping (Image provided by Fran Cortés)

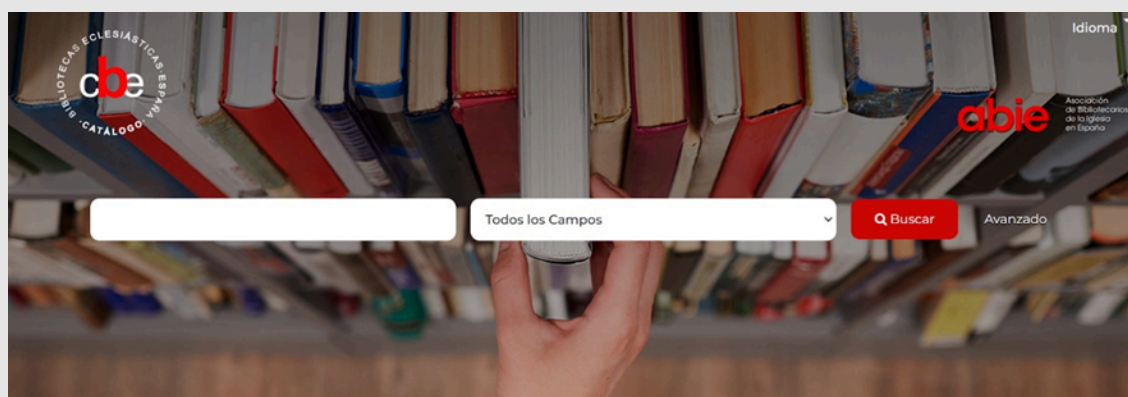
We then examined every library for the quality of their MARC records using two objectives. Firstly, to try to improve the records in origin, that is, in the different catalogues, and secondly, to ensure the best situation of the registers when uploading them to the union catalogue.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
BIBLIOTECA	ULG: Universidad Loyola - Granada									
SISTEMA	Librisuite/Vufind									
OBSERVACIONES										
OAI FUNCIONAL	SI		No tiene en cuenta borrados					001 => Control Number		
			Los registros no tienen el namespace:					003 => Control Number Identifier		
Tag fondos	852		xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"					005 => Date and Time of Latest Transaction		
Tag Identificador	001		Hay que incorporarlo para que sean válidos					006 => Fixed-Length Data Elements -- Addi		
								007 => Physical Description Fixed Field		
								008 => Fixed Length Data Elements		
Subcampos fondos	Valor ejemplo	Significado						016 => National Bibliographic Agency Contr		
								017 => Copyright or Legal Deposit Number		
								020 => International Standard Book Numbe		
								022 => International Standard Serial Numbe		
								024 => Other Standard Identifier		
								026 => THIS FIELD IS NOT STANDARD!!		



[Image 4] Example of the URL for an Individual Library Catalogue, the Universidad Pontificia Comillas Catalogue (Image provided by Fran Cortés)

At the end of 2024, we launched a new website for the union catalogue with a new URL, <https://www.bibliotecaseclesiasticas.es> (churchlibraries.es), to host not only the catalogue but to also showcase upcoming projects related to cataloguing and other future ideas.



[Image 5] The New Union Catalogue Website (The image provided by Fran Cortés)

Coming Soon

We continue to contact new institutions to join the union catalogue, gathering a total of almost eight million items, from the catalogues of other individual libraries and the union catalogues of certain Religious Orders not currently participating. Although it will be a decision that must be taken by the working group, in the future we aspire to include registers from other sources such as online books, journals, and institutional repositories. This is one of the reasons we opted for Vufind as the OPAC for the project, as we are looking forward to future integrations of additional sources other than catalogues of MARC records.

The collective catalogue aims to be a starting point for building a network of Church libraries in Spain, complete with common cataloguing standards, an inter-library loan procedure, and a training calendar.

Future Ideas

Future projects connected to the union catalogue include an institutional repository and common library management software. Following the footsteps of the union catalogue's sustainability plan, libraries interested in tackling repository or library software must contribute economically according to their capacity.

In the case of the institutional repository, ABIE's objective is to offer small libraries the opportunity to ask for public financing to digitize their historical funds since there is public funding available for digitization in Spain if the files are uploaded to an open repository.

We also hope to provide smaller libraries with a library management system if they do not have software such as Inmagic or other basic library software. Depending on demand, we could offer a module for cataloguing as well as lending and acquisitions.

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