



Speech

Analysis of Texts for the OFM Lay Brothers Congress

St. Mary of the Angels, May 2, 2025

The Common Thread

The common thread that emerges from the analysis of the documents can be described as a **historical-theological journey of rediscovery and revaluation of the Franciscan lay brother's vocation**. This journey is articulated through five interconnected dimensions:

1. **Historical and identity evolution** - Transition from the functional concept ("what a lay brother does") to the vocational dimension ("who a lay brother is"), rediscovering the authentic expression of being a "brother" according to the fundamental Franciscan values.
2. **Unity in diversity** - Recognition that all friars share the same fundamental mission while expressing it through different charisms and responding to different ecclesial and contextual needs. The vocation takes distinct forms depending on cultural and historical contexts.
3. **Tension between recognition and minority** - The search for adequate recognition as an element of the lay brother's experience, which must nevertheless remain faithful to the spirituality of Franciscan minority.
4. **Theological witness** - The vocation of the lay brother as an expression of a specific theological witness in the contemporary Church, with its own contribution to ecclesial communion.
5. **Integrated formative approach** - Need to renew both internal formation and external communication to support this vision, starting from a common foundation and then developing personalized paths.

Emerging Ideas to Strengthen and Relaunch

1. Transformative Historical Narrative

The transition "from function to vocation" represents a powerful narrative tool that deserves further development. This transition can be proposed as a paradigm for understanding other transformations within religious life and the Church, highlighting:

- The evolution of theological understanding of the role of lay brothers.
- The overcoming of hierarchical visions of religious vocation.
- The contribution of this evolution to the understanding of consecrated life as a whole.

2. Inculturation of the Vocation



The cultural dimension suggests the importance of understanding how the vocation of the lay brother is incarnated in significant ways in different areas of the world. An inculturated approach could:

- Value the plurality of expressions of the same vocation.
- Offer contextualized formative models.
- Develop a framework of common principles to guide local adaptations.
- Create spaces for sharing best practices among different Entities.

3. Existential and Theological Witness

The idea of "lay" fraternity as a theological witness opens up profound perspectives that connect personal experience with ecclesiological reflection:

- How lay fraternity witnesses to specific aspects of the Christian mystery.
- How this witness complements that of ordained ministry.
- What specific contribution it offers to the understanding of the Church as a communion of diverse vocations.
- How to identify and enhance the "best practices" of evangelization by lay brothers.

4. Dialectic Between Recognition and Minority

The paradox between the search for recognition and the Franciscan ideal of minority offers a fertile ground for reflection:

- How to pursue just valuation while remaining faithful to the spirituality of minority.
- How to transform this tension into creative energy for renewal.
- Articulating what it means to be a lay brother in positive terms, not only in contrast to being a priest.
- Proposing concrete examples of how this identity is manifested in daily life.

5. Integrated and Differentiated Formation

The emerging formative model deserves particular attention for its ability to balance unity and specificity:

- Common initial foundation for all friars.
- Personalization of formation paths based on individual gifts and calls.
- Respect for differences without creating hierarchies of value.

This approach requires specifying:

- The constitutive elements of the "common Franciscan foundation."
- The ways to structure formative phases that value both unity and diversity.
- The criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of personalized formation paths.



6. Prophetic Dimension for Our Time

The vocation of the lay brother carries with it a prophetic dimension for contemporary ecclesial challenges:

- Contribution to synodality and co-responsibility in the Church.
- Witness of fraternity in a world marked by divisions.
- Model of non-clerical service in a Church that seeks to overcome clericalism.
- Laboratory of renewed ecclesial relationships.

The renewal of understanding of the lay brother's vocation can thus become an opportunity to revitalize the entire Franciscan fraternity, strengthening unity in diversity.

Integrated Action Plan

From the analysis emerges the possibility of an action plan articulated in four phases:

1. Rediscovery and Reappropriation

- Recovery of the history of the lay brother's vocation in different contexts.
- Collection and enhancement of personal experiences.
- Development of an updated theology of vocation.

2. Formative Renewal

- Revision of initial formation programs to ensure a common foundation.
- Development of personalized paths that respect individual gifts.
- Creation of tools for evaluating evangelizing practices.

3. Contextualized Implementation

- Flexible application in different Entities.
- Monitoring and sharing of significant experiences.

4. Communication and Awareness

- Internal: for all members of the Order.
- External: for the Church and wider society.

Conclusion

The common thread that emerges from the integrated analysis of all documents proposes a renewed vision of the Franciscan vocation that goes beyond the simple distinction between lay brothers and priests to embrace a model of differentiated unity. In this vision, the vocation of the lay brother is not simply reaffirmed but reintegrated within a deeper understanding of the common Franciscan vocation.

For an effective relaunch, it appears appropriate to:

1. Develop a coherent narrative that integrates all these elements.
2. Present concrete testimonies of the evolution "from function to vocation."
3. Articulate a theology of the lay brother's vocation that shows its ecclesial relevance.
4. Outline formation paths that value both the experiential and theological dimensions.



This integration would allow for moving beyond a simple reaffirmation of identity in favor of a dynamic and prophetic proposal for the entire Church, in which the vocation of the Franciscan lay brother offers a significant contribution to the rediscovery of fraternity as an ecclesial paradigm.

Br. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM
Minister General