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Al termine dell'Udienza Generale di oggi, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI riceve, nell'Auletta dell'Aula Paolo VI, i Membri dell'Ufficio dell'Assemblea Parlamentare del Consiglio d'Europa e rivolge loro il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

● **DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE**

Mr President,

Dear members of the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

I am very grateful to the Honourable Mr Çavuşoğlu for the kind words he addressed to me on behalf of the Bureau and I extend to all of you a cordial welcome. I am happy to receive you on the sixtieth anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights which, as is well known, commits Member States of the Council of Europe to promote and defend the inviolable dignity of the human person.

I know that the Parliamentary Assembly has on its agenda important topics that deal above all with persons who live in particularly difficult situations or are subjected to grave violations of their dignity. I have in mind people afflicted with handicaps, children who suffer violence, immigrants, refugees, those who pay the most for the present economic and financial crisis, those who are victims of extremism or of new forms of slavery such as

human trafficking, the illegal drug trade and prostitution. Your work also is concerned with victims of warfare and with people who live in fragile democracies. I have also been informed of your efforts to defend religious freedom and to oppose violence and intolerance against believers in Europe and worldwide.

Keeping in mind the context of today's society in which different peoples and cultures come together, it is imperative to develop the universal validity of these rights as well as their inviolability, inalienability and indivisibility.

On different occasions I have pointed out the risks associated with relativism in the area of values, rights and duties. If these were to lack an objective rational foundation, common to all peoples, and were based exclusively on particular cultures, legislative decisions or court judgements, how could they offer a solid and long-lasting ground for supranational institutions such as the Council of Europe, and for your own task within that prestigious institution? How could a fruitful dialogue among cultures take place without common values, rights and stable, universal principles understood in the same way by all Members States of the Council of Europe? These values, rights and duties are rooted in the natural dignity of each person, something which is accessible to human reasoning. The Christian faith does not impede, but favours this search, and is an invitation to seek a supernatural basis for this dignity.

I am convinced that these principles, faithfully maintained, above all when dealing with human life, from conception to natural death, with marriage – rooted in the exclusive and indissoluble gift of self between one man and one woman – and freedom of religion and education, are necessary conditions if we are to respond adequately to the decisive and urgent challenges that history presents to each one of you.

Dear friends, I know that you also wish to reach out to those who suffer. This gives me joy and I encourage you to fulfil your sensitive and important mission with moderation, wisdom and courage at the service of the common good of Europe. I thank you for coming and I assure you of my prayers. May God bless you!

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