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Catholics assail EU bill of rights

London Sunday Telegraph (10.12.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (11.12.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - London--Europe's senior Roman Catholic bishops, including the most Rev. Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the archbishop of Westminster, have attacked the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights for ignoring God.

In a letter to EU officials, they said that the charter ignored God and Europe's Christian past and opened the door to recognition of homosexual unions.

The criticism was echoed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, one of the pope's closest advisers.

The summit of EU leaders ends today in Nice, France, where the charter was promulgated amid controversy about its status.

While British ministers emphasized that the document carried no legal weight, French and other officials depicted it as the opening to a future binding bill of rights for all of Europe.

The bishops, who included Archbishop Murphy-O'Connor, spiritual leader of Catholics in England and Wales, and Cardinal Thomas Winning, his counterpart in Scotland, were highly critical of the removal of references to Europe's cultural and religious heritage.

The passages were taken out of the draft preamble by French premier Lionel Jospin, who said that any reference to religion was "unacceptable" to the secular French republic.

The bishops welcomed much of the charter but lamented the lack of any reference to God in the document. They also complained that, by failing to distinguish between the right to marry and the right to form a family, it appeared to sanction cohabiting couples and homosexual unions and make it easier for homosexual couples to adopt children.

The Rev. Crispian Hollis, bishop of Portsmouth, England, and a member of the Commission of Bishop' Conferences of the European Community, said that the charter was "an avowedly secular document" that failed to recognize the rights of churches.