

Vatican Eases Ban on Freemasons

VATICAN CITY, March 12 (UPI) — The Vatican has virtually scrapped an old church law excommunicating Catholics who join the order of Freemasons, Vatican sources said Monday.

The sources said Catholics now are free to join the Masons in the United States, Britain and most other countries of the world.

But the European grand orient lodge form of Masonry, established primarily in Italy and France, is still considered anti-Catholic or atheistic, they said.

Freemasonry, which dates back to medieval times, describes itself as a nonpolitical, nonsectarian movement dedicated to the ideal of universal brotherhood.

5-Million

There are more than five million Masons in the world, most of them in English-speaking lands. The United States alone accounts for nearly four million members.

Pope Clement XII condemned the order in 1738 as atheistic and anti-Catholic, and his action has been affirmed by seven other Popes in 16 different pronouncements.

The Eastern Orthodox Church and

some Protestant bodies also have opposed Freemasonry.

But a move to re-evaluate the Catholic Church's position on Freemasonry began during the second Vatican Ecumenical Council which ended in 1965.

Unofficial

Vatican sources said there had been no official revocation of the excommunication law but the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has let it be known Catholics joining Free Masons orders are no longer automatically excommunicated.

"The church's new attitude has been in effect for more than a year," they said.

The church's code of Canon Law, drawn up in 1918 and presently being reformed, provided for automatic excommunication of Catholics "who enroll in the Masonic sect or in secret societies conspiring against the church or the legitimate authorities."

Vatican sources said this wording would be changed to modify the church position on Masonry when the new code of Canon Law is completed. △

WILMARTH . . .

munity about us, how differences can be forged into unity, when the brotherhood of man is valued more than the individuality of man.

Let us engage ourselves in positive action to discover more similarities, instead of reviving old differences.

Let us not let good ideas remain dormant but translate them into good deeds through action.

Let us be a dynamic force for good rather than passively ignore the evil

that is rampant about us.

Let us join hands together, giving birth this day to a new direction dedicated to extending the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God throughout this land of ours, and in time throughout the world.

Let today be the beginning of the Order of Knights-Masons dedicated to the accomplishment of these things which we as Knights and Masons hold dearest to our hearts.