

ONASSIS DIVORCE A CHURCH MATTER

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No Word on Catholic Sanction
of Mrs. Kennedy's Marriage

By JOHN LEO

There was no word last night from Roman Catholic authorities on whether the church has sanctioned Mrs. John F. Kennedy's forthcoming marriage to Aristotle Onassis, who has been divorced.

The church forbids Catholics to marry divorced persons. Mrs. Kennedy is a Roman Catholic and Mr. Onassis, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, was divorced in 1960 by his first wife, Greek shipping heiress, Athina Livanos.

In such situations involving a Catholic and a divorced person, the marriage is often performed in a civil ceremony or in another church.

The Roman Catholic church teaches that marriage is an indissoluble contract. Under extraordinary circumstances, however, its marriage courts can grant annulments, which are declarations that a true and valid marriage never existed.

Grounds for annulment are varied, and when an annulment is granted the church never reveals the reason, out of concern for the privacy of the parties involved.

The most common grounds are nonconsummation of the marriage, a refusal by one partner to have children, and the argument that one partner was coerced into the marriage in some way.

Mr. Onassis' divorce presents no problem within his own Greek Orthodox church, which allows three sequential marriages. In other words, a member may remarry twice after divorce or the death of a spouse, but the third marriage must be the last one.

If Roman Catholic authorities rule that Mrs. Kennedy is free to marry Mr. Onassis, it would most likely be because of the church's marriage courts had decided that Mr. Onassis' first marriage was invalid.

May Start in Rome

This would normally require a special investigation, initiated by the Catholic party in the marriage court of his or her own diocese. For Mrs. Kennedy, that would be the court of the Archdiocese of New York, though proceedings could be begun directly in Rome.