

THE GOVORA NOMOCANON (PRAVILA) STIPULATIONS REGARDING THE FAMILY

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Abstract. The Govora Nomocanon (Pravila), printed between 1640 and 1641 at the Govora Monastery at the initiative of Matei Basarab, marks the beginning of printed law codes in the Romanian language in Wallachia. Its content reflects both the influence of Byzantine canon law and a series of locally adapted regulations, which grants it significant historical and legal value.

Among the many aspects addressed in the Govora Law Code, such as clerical discipline, the penitential system, and canonical sanctions, this study aims to explore in depth the institution of the family, with a focus on norms concerning kinship, marriage, parental authority, and the penalties for transgressions. I am particularly interested in aspects such as the prohibition of marriage between close relatives, marriage with persons of other religions, the regulation of second or third marriages, and the importance of consent in the conclusion of marriage. All these perspectives reflect a legal mentality in which the family is regarded both as a social nucleus and as a moral bastion within a strong Orthodox tradition shaped by Byzantine ethos.

Therefore, the present research represents an attempt to reassess the contribution of the Govora Nomocanon to the consolidation of the family institution in the Romanian premodern context, with an emphasis on how religious law was articulated with the social realities of the 17th century.

Key words: Govora Nomocanon, pravila, canon law, family, kinship, marriage

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Introduction. As it is known “Beginning in the sixteenth century, Romanian churches began printing various nomocanons in the language of the people. All of these were known as pravile (law codes)” (Stan 1960, 346).

In the mid-seventeenth century, society in Wallachia was deeply agrarian, hierarchically structured, traditional, and influenced by Orthodox values, Byzantine law, and Ottoman suzerainty. The social structure was clearly stratified. At the top of the social pyramid stood the prince, supported by an elite composed of great boyars and high officials. The boyars held administrative and military offices and controlled most of the land. The Orthodox clergy, organized around the metropolitan See and the episcopates, played an essential role not only in religious matters but also in cultural and legal affairs. The peasantry formed the majority of the population and was divided into *moşneni* (free peasants with their own land) and *vecini* or *rumâni* (dependent peasants, bound to labor obligations and taxes) (Romanian Academy 2003, V, 106–110).

In towns, which were few and small in size, a social layer of craftsmen and merchants emerged, but urban life remained modest compared to other European regions. Political power was concentrated in the hands of the ruler, although he had to continuously negotiate with the great boyars, who were protective of their privileges. Although Wallachia was under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, it retained significant internal autonomy, especially regarding ecclesiastical organization and the application of law (Dură 1989, 159-170). However, the prince needed to be confirmed by the Ottoman Porte and was obliged to pay tribute.

The collective mentality was conservative, shaped by traditions, religious norms, and group values. The

family was seen as a fundamental social institution, regulated both legally and morally, and the authority of parents, the man, and the priest was rarely questioned.

By the mid-seventeenth century, in Wallachia, the family was regarded as one of the most important institutions of society (Mititelu 2008, 412-419) in which we find provisions of the Roman law (Mititelu 2019, 32-35). The man was the head of the household and held authority over his wife and children. Marriage was considered a religious sacrament (Dură 2023, 29-60; Mititelu 2023, 81-104) two ancient institutions of mankind. Therefore, we could not be entered into arbitrarily: it required mutual consent, parental approval, and adherence to specific rules, such as the prohibition of marriage between blood relatives or with persons of a different faith. Second marriages were allowed, but under certain conditions and with a less festive character, being viewed as a concession granted by the Church.

The printing of the Govora Nomocanon (Pravila) around the middle of the seventeenth century “constitutes both the expression and the proof of the homogeneous preservation throughout the Romanian Church of the nomocanonical tradition, which remained so vibrant in Orthodoxy” (Stan 1960, 346).

Regarding the family, the Govora Nomocanon includes clear norms: what is permitted and what is not, what punishments are applied in cases of rule violations, the importance of kinship and how it affects the conclusion of marriage, what the relationships between parents and children should be, and so on (Peretz 1928, vol. II, part I, 341–342). Thus, in light of the provisions of the Govora Nomocanon, the family was understood both as a form of personal life and as an essential part of the social and moral order of the time, evidence of the fact that “pravilnic law reflected much of the ecclesiastical and state life and organization of the Romanian principalities” (Stan 2012, 172).

Provisions regarding the Family. From the very first chapters, the Govora Nomocanon (Mititelu 2014, 12-45) makes reference to the relationship between parents and children, and ipso facto about family (Mititelu 2015, 151-169; Dură, Petrescu 2014, 115-130).

Specifically, I refer to the mention found at the beginning of chapter (glava) 8, where, in an archaic form but with clear moral and legal value, the principle of parental equity toward their children is articulated, especially with regard to the dotal regime (Mititelu 2021/2022, 272-285): “Parents should divide their possessions in a fair and rightful manner among their sons, not loving one more and hating the other; for our Lord Jesus Christ has planted both sons and youths, and has given them both visible and invisible things; and even if the parents become angry, the law itself does not become angry” (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 91).

From this text arises the responsibility of parents to be just and equitable when distributing their property (here referred to as *possessions*) among their sons. The phrase “in a fair and rightful manner” means with justice and with “equity” that is “with fair measure” (Dură 2015, 409; Dură 2019a, 45-56). Moreover, the passage of this Pravila rejects favoritism that might stem from personal sympathies, which could lead to injustice and disrupt peace within the family. At the same time, the condemnation of partiality is emphasized. In a traditional society, where the parent was both the owner of property and the supreme authority in the household, the risk of favoring a “beloved” son was real. The Nomocanon demands that the parent not decide based on affection, but on justice. It is a call for moral discernment and fraternal equality.

In fact, this principle of parental equity toward children is echoed repeatedly in Holy Scripture. Saint Paul, in both the Epistle to the Ephesians (6:4) and the Epistle to the Colossians (3:21), urges parents to adopt a balanced attitude toward their children. In the Gospel of Luke, the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) offers an important lesson on fairness, showing that, regardless of circumstances, the father loves both sons.

In the text of the Nomocanon, the example of our Savior Jesus Christ is offered. This reference serves a theological and justificatory role. Christ is presented as the one who created “sons and youths” (meaning all

people) without discrimination. He has justly granted everyone both “the visible and the invisible”, that is, bodily and spiritual gifts, material and immaterial alike. Therefore, the Christian parent must imitate this nondiscriminatory generosity. The example of the Savior becomes the foundation for the legal norm.

Thus, the relevant provision of the Govora Nomocanon condemns parental partiality in the division of property, offering both a biblical model and a juridical argument for equality among children, free from the influence of personal feelings. It follows that, in this case, the provisions of the Govora Nomocanon display a strong Christian moral character, but also serve a clear social function, namely, preserving peace within the family and ensuring order in inheritance matters.

In the Govora (Nomocanon), the relationship between family members is not limited to material aspects. Chapter 8 regulates the respect that should exist between parents and children and strictly punishes any form of contempt, violence, or insubordination, while also affirming the responsibility of parents for the moral education of their children.

“If a son speaks evil words to his parents unjustly, he shall die; because his parents gave him light and life” (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 91). The principle of absolute respect for one’s parents is based on the sacred authority of motherhood and fatherhood. Speaking evil to one’s parents is seen not only as a moral offense, but also as a legal transgression that carries the death penalty, at least in principle, under the influence of the Old Testament: “Whoever curses his father, or his mother shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:17). The justification is deeply theological: parents “gave him light and life”, meaning existence and formation.

And yet, as the Govora Nomocanon further provides: “But if he repents of what he has done, let him receive a canon of penance, and then his father and mother shall forgive him” (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 91). Here appears an important nuance: repentance and forgiveness are possible, in the spirit of Christianity. The wrongdoing is serious, but it is not irrevocable if the son sincerely repents. Particularly striking is another provision of the Govora Nomocanon: “And if he takes a stick and strikes his father, his hand shall be cut off” (Bujoreanu 1885 III, 91). This norm imposes an extremely harsh physical punishment, namely, the cutting off of the hand, for a son who strikes his parent, marking the act as one of absolute sacrilege.

This provision has a predominantly legal character, rather than a canonical one, although it is grounded in Scripture: “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12). Striking one’s father with an object (a stick) symbolizes violence and a brutal revolt against the familial order. In the mentality of the time, the parent held a quasi-sacred status, and violence against them was considered a grave offense. It is no coincidence that the punishment targets the very organ (the hand) that committed the act.

Chapter 8 continues with the statement: “If a son reviles his mother, it would have been better for him never to have been born”. In Old Romanian, “reviles” means to insult, to show disdain, to behave disrespectfully, not necessarily physical aggression, but verbal or attitudinal. The expression “it would have been better for him never to have been born” is more moral than juridical. It conveys the utmost gravity of showing contempt toward one’s mother. It is a spiritual condemnation, suggesting that such a child tramples upon their very identity by rejecting the love that formed them.

Equally important is the duty of parents to instruct their children “in the fear of God”. This provision is essential and shifts the emphasis to parental responsibility. Parents must educate their children, instilling the fear of God, meaning respect, discipline, and moral conscience. This rule, like the others, finds its counterpart in the Bible: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

It is not enough to punish the child; the error must be prevented through moral formation.

From the aforementioned aspects, it becomes evident that Chapter 8 of the Govora Nomocanon reflects a theologically and juridically strict vision, yet one coherent with the period and the mentality of the time.

The authority of parents is regarded as sacred. It is grounded in scriptural principles. Children are called to absolute obedience and respect, under threat of severe punishments, including criminal ones. Emphasis is placed on education in the “fear of God”. The ideal is not punishment, but the prevention of error.

An important issue regulated by the Govora Nomocanon in connection with family life is kinship (Mititelu 2013a, 122-140). This appears in Chapter 8, where the relationship between biological (bodily) parents and spiritual parents is hierarchized in favor of the latter, not out of disregard for the natural family, but out of respect for the saving role of spiritual parenthood: “Greater honor and love must be shown to spiritual fathers and mothers than to bodily parents, for while bodily parents uproot a curse from its root, spiritual parents may lose the soul” (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 91).

The Nomocanon emphasizes that spiritual parents are to be honored with greater love and reverence than biological ones, because their role is decisive for the salvation of the soul. They give spiritual birth through baptism, guide through confession, and nourish through Holy Communion. To despise them is to endanger not only the social order but also the eschatological direction of one’s own life.

The statement “bodily parents uproot a curse from its foundation, but spiritual parents lose the soul” should be understood as expressing a hierarchy of authority. A biological parent may, through a curse, affect one’s life and worldly stability (ruined families, broken destinies), while the spiritual parent holds the power to lose the soul through separation from God, caused by contempt, disobedience, or a break from the Church. It is a severe form of pedagogy, yet typical of medieval normative language, aiming to instill personal responsibility for one’s spiritual vocation.

At the same time, recognizing “greater honor” for spiritual parents ultimately signifies the central role of the Church in community life.

The regulation of spiritual kinship in the Govora Nomocanon is not incidental. As we shall see, this form of kinship constitutes an impediment to marriage.

It is very important to note that, in the Orthodox canonical tradition, kinship in general, under certain circumstances, constitutes a relative impediment to marriage. At first, the rules governing the relationship between kinship and marriage were “inherited from Mosaic law and Roman law, as in the early centuries the Christian communities followed Mosaic and Roman regulations” (Floca 1990, II, 83).

According to Roman law, marriage was prohibited between blood relatives up to and including the third degree (Cocoş 2003, 102), and from the end of the fourth century, up to the fourth degree (Mititelu 2013b, 231). Mosaic law also prohibited marriage between blood relatives up to and including the third degree (Mititelu 2013b, 231).

Gradually, beginning with the Holy Apostles, “new norms were established in this regard, based on religious considerations” (Floca 1990, II, 83). Later, the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (in 692) “prohibited marriage between blood relatives up to the fourth degree, both in direct and collateral lines” (Floca 1990, II, 83). Thus, canons 53 and 54 of the Quinisext Council standardized the limits concerning marriage impediments: canon 53 regarding spiritual kinship, and canon 54 addressing blood kinship and affinity.

In the tenth century, “the Romano-Byzantine legislative collection known as the Basilika (a Byzantine legal code) extended the impediment to marriage between consanguineous relatives to the sixth degree; later, a synod held in Constantinople in 1166 established that marriage was forbidden between blood relatives up to the seventh degree” (Mititelu 2013b, 231).

We encounter in the text of the Govora Nomocanon references to marriage impediments: “And we also teach these things, not without the teaching of God, but with His counsel and with understanding, that everyone should consider his cousins and guard himself from marrying among them, up to the fourth degree of kinship; and if possible, even up to the fifth degree of kinship, he should not marry his cousins, for these

are of mixed blood" (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 91).

A number of aspects must be observed in relation to this text. First of all, the basis of the regulation is divine: "the teaching of God". This formulation introduces the sacred dimension of the law, reinforcing the authority of the commandment and suggesting that moral norms must be applied with discernment and reverence for God, not solely out of legal constraint.

Moreover, one can observe that the norm sets forth a clear prohibition, namely that up to the fourth degree of kinship, no one is allowed to marry "his cousins", meaning those in a close collateral line. Thus, the Nomocanon establishes that only consanguinity up to the fourth degree constitutes an impediment to marriage, as stipulated by canon 54 trullan and also by Roman legislation during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great (Mititelu 2013b, 231).

In addition, the Nomocanon offers a further recommendation, "if possible", to avoid kinship up to the fifth degree. This demonstrates a heightened prudence, exceeding the strictly legal limit. The fourth and fifth degrees of kinship correspond to canonical and genealogical calculations: the fourth degree signified a first cousin, while the fifth degree included second cousins.

The final phrase, "for these are of mixed blood," must not be understood biologically, but rather symbolically and morally. It expresses the idea that the union of close relatives, when extended into sexual and marital spheres, disturbs the natural order of human relationships.

In traditional thought, blood represented an identity factor, sacred and defining. To "mix" blood among close relatives was seen as contaminating the purity of the lineage and undermining the order established by God.

We can assert that the norm laid down in the Govora Nomocanon is in full continuity with the canonical rules of the Orthodox Church, which prohibit marriage between blood relatives up to the seventh degree (and in certain eras and jurisdictions, up to the fourth).

Through this prohibition, the aim was to protect family integrity, avoid hidden incest, and maintain a clear boundary between familial affection and conjugal relationships, so as not to disrupt the social structure.

In the Govora Nomocanon, the regulation of marriage prohibitions is not limited to consanguinity. In the same Chapter 8, reference is also made to "cross-brotherhood" as an impediment to marriage. The relevant text reflects an expanded conception of kinship, which is not confined to biological ties but also includes sacramental ones, with "cross-brotherhood" being a kinship that the legislator assimilated to adoption or spiritual parentage (Mititelu 2013b, 231).

The Govora Nomocanon thus provides: "Your cross-brother must not take your sister; nor shall your brother take the sister of your cross-brother, for they are called soul brothers, and indeed they are, having sworn on the Holy Gospel and the Holy Cross. Likewise, a godfather must not marry his godchild's mother. But if any fornication should occur between him and his godchild's mother or her children, which may God forbid, if such a devilish plan should happen, they shall be punished with five years of penance, repenting with only bread and water, and from then on they should not look upon one another; nor shall your godfather or your sister marry, for this is again mixed blood; a fine of one thousand thalers shall be pronounced for this sin" (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 91). This text is particularly noteworthy and reveals a number of important perspectives. Firstly, "your cross-brother" and "your cross-brother's sister" here refer to a cross-brother, that is, a man with whom one has formed a solemn and sacred alliance akin to brotherhood. In many parts of the Romanian Principalities, as well as throughout the Balkans, cross-brotherhood was a vow taken by two young men (or men) declaring themselves brothers for life. This oath was often made on the Gospel and the Cross, within a religious or semi-religious setting, and entailed absolute loyalty, mutual support, and symbolic kinship.

In traditional society, an oath made on the Cross and the Holy Gospel was both a promise and a sacred act that created a real and irreversible bond. Breaking this bond through sexual relations or marriage with the sister of one's cross-brother amounted to a moral violation and a betrayal of a spiritual covenant. The Govora Nomocanon treats this form of kinship with the same seriousness as blood ties, explicitly prohibiting any marital or sexual relationship between "soul brothers" and their sisters.

The fragment cited above is also noteworthy for prohibiting marriage between godparents and godchildren, that is, between persons bound by a degree of spiritual kinship or who are "related in a religious sense" (Floca 1990 II, 79). The relationships between a godparent and their godchildren, or between a godparent and the relatives of their godchildren, are also considered spiritual kinship and, therefore, canonically subject to the same prohibitions.

The punishment prescribed is severe and reflects the gravity of the sin. This is not a mere admonishment, but a prolonged period of penance, accompanied by strict fasting and a prohibition against any further interaction. The expression "mixed blood" signals a disruption of order, a sin that disturbs the natural and sacred structure of human relationships. For the medieval person, observing these boundaries was essential both for social balance and personal salvation.

Notably, this fragment from the Govora Nomocanon does not refer exclusively to consanguinity (kinship through common biological parents), nor solely to baptismal godparents. Rather, it focuses primarily on spiritual kinship created through cross-brotherhood and godparenthood. Both cross-brothers and godparents were considered spiritual brothers, and marriage between them or with their close relatives was forbidden, being regarded as a grave sin and punished by severe penance. These norms illustrate the seriousness with which traditional Romanian society viewed oaths, spiritual bonds, and moral order.

Among the many aspects concerning the family, the Govora Nomocanon also addresses the importance of mutual consent in marriage. Specifically, Chapter 22 of the Nomocanon states the following: "He who takes a woman by force shall undergo three years of penance and pay the bailiff what is due, for this is not called marriage by force, but rather robbery and fornication and utter disgrace" (Bujoreanu 1885 III, 98).

This passage covers an essential aspect of matrimonial law in old Romanian jurisprudence because it explicitly condemns the coercion of a woman into a marital or sexual relationship. The act is defined as "robbery", "fornication", and "utter disgrace", terms carrying the highest juridical and moral weight in the context of the time.

In Roman law, the consent of both spouses, *affectio maritalis*, was a fundamental condition for the validity of marriage (Cocoş 2003, 103). From a canonical perspective, the absence of mutual consent constitutes an absolute impediment. "Among the causes that nullify this consent are mentioned: violence, abduction, deceit, manipulation, etc." (Mititelu 2020, 223).

The Govora Nomocanon embraces this essential requirement for valid marriage. It states unequivocally that taking a woman by force does not constitute legitimate marriage. The text uses a dual legal-moral qualification: it is not "marriage", but "robbery" and "fornication." This distinction underscores the idea that, in the Nomocanon's view, a marriage is valid only if it is based on the free will of both parties, both the man and the woman.

This perspective aligns with the tradition of Orthodox canon law, which consistently views marriage as an act freely consented to by both spouses. Patristic and liturgical tradition does not recognize forced marriage as valid before God, regardless of outward formalities.

The importance of respecting this norm is also emphasized through the penalties and legal classifications indicated in the text. "Three years of penance" is a canonical sanction, equivalent to excommunication from the Eucharist and the requirement to live an ascetic life as acknowledgment of the sin's gravity. "To pay the

bailiff what is due” refers to a civil punishment, meaning the imposition of a fine or compensation determined by the secular authority (the bailiffs were local administrative officials). This demonstrates the collaboration between ecclesiastical and civil authorities in sanctioning such acts. The terms “robbery” and “fornication” refer to extremely serious offenses: the former implies violence and abduction, and the latter indicates sexual sin outside marriage, made all the more serious when it involves coercion.

Thus, by regulating the necessity of consent for the conclusion of marriage, the Govora Nomocanon clearly expresses a fundamental legal and moral principle: that marriage without consent is null, and that forcing a woman into such a union is both a grave sin and a social crime.

The act is punished both canonically (three years of penance) and civilly (penalties imposed by bailiffs), showing that in old Romanian law, Church and State cooperated to protect human dignity and the sanctity of marriage.

Through this provision, the Nomocanon affirms the importance of personal freedom and responsibility in the establishment of marriage and protects spouses from abusive practices that might falsely be justified in the name of marriage. Ultimately, the text carries a deep sense of moral justice and personal protection, especially considering it was applied in an era when women did not always benefit from explicit guarantees in other legal domains.

Regarding marriage, the Govora Nomocanon contains norms referring to second, third, and fourth marriages. In chapter 26, it is stated: “Three weddings are not given by God's law; whoever enters into three weddings, truly, whoever engages in this unlawful act commits fornication; such a person shall do penance for 8 years” (Bujoreanu 1885 III, 99). In chapter 76, the same Nomocanon stipulates: “We instruct that at a second marriage, the couple should not stand before the holy Altar when they come to be blessed in the Church, nor should the crowns be placed upon their heads. However, if one of them is pure, they may have the power to stand before the altar, but still, even then, they should not receive the crown” (Bujoreanu 1885 III, 109). The topic is also addressed in chapter 83: “If someone enters a second marriage after many years, they shall do penance for 2 years; but if they are young and their wife has died, and they can bear it, according to the word of the Apostle, they should remain as they are. But if they cannot, then they may take a second wife. If an old man remarries, he angers God and shall do penance for 3 years, with 24 prostrations daily” (Bujoreanu 1885, III, 109). Furthermore, the same chapter 83 states: “If someone enters a third marriage, they shall do penance for 4 years, with 66 prostrations daily, for they are called fornicators. Whoever marries four times shall do penance for 8 years, with 110 prostrations daily, for such people commit fornication and anger God” (Bujoreanu 1885 III, 109–110).

In canonical tradition, the subject of second marriage is addressed in canons: 17 apostolic, 3 trullan, 12 and 87 of Basil the Great. These canonical texts consider a second marriage an impediment to receiving the Sacrament of Ordination. Only one canon, canon 7 of the local Synod of Neocaesarea, refers to second marriage as an option for those who have divorced and who are evidently not clerics. The canon implies that, although the Church accepts second marriage, it does not enjoy the same solemnity as the first: “A presbyter should not attend the wedding feast of those married a second time, for a second marriage requires penance” (Floca 2005, 215). During the pan-Orthodox synod in Constantinople (920), third marriages were “allowed and included among canonical marriages” (Mititelu 2013b, 234), while fourth marriages were banned through the so-called Tomos of Union (Mititelu 2013b, 234).

From the four mentioned texts, it is clear that the Govora Nomocanon accepted second marriage but rejected third and fourth marriages.

In the case of second marriage, the Govora Nomocanon expresses a clear attitude of restraint and regulation toward remarriage, seen as a form of descent from the matrimonial ideal. It does not absolutely

condemn the possibility of a second union, but it does draw boundaries and makes a visible distinction between the first marriage, seen as a pure and fully blessed union, and the second, which is permitted only with some reservation. The statement that second-time newlyweds “should not stand before the holy Altar” primarily expresses a notion of liturgical dignity.

Not all those entering marriage are placed on the same level in terms of what the Church expresses publicly. Not standing before the altar means acknowledging that this marriage does not carry the same symbolic weight and is not the expression of the same fullness of conjugal life as the first. The same logic applies to the prohibition against “placing crowns upon their heads”. The crowns symbolize the union of the couple, but also the honor and beauty of a bond made in full freedom, purity, and uniqueness. A second marriage implies that at least one of the two was previously bonded to another person, and this rupture is acknowledged through a different ritual.

The passage is even more nuanced when it speaks of the case in which one of the spouses “is pure” (meaning has not been married before). Even in this case, the “pure” one is not crowned, because marriage is a joint act, and its character cannot be split between two people with different histories. What is done together must be received together.

The Nomocanon’s perspective on second marriage conveys a deeper idea: that marriage is not merely a human companionship, but an event requiring a certain order in life and an inner disposition. The first marriage is celebrated with full joy and openness from the Church, precisely because it expresses a beginning rooted in the fullness of divine order. The second, even if permitted, is performed with discretion and with the awareness that the individual has already undergone an experience that cannot be undone. This is not about despising people who choose to remarry, but about the necessity for them to recognize the need for repentance.

Regarding third and fourth marriages, the Govora Nomocanon is as clear as can be: these are forbidden. The clarification in Chapter 26 refers to the term “fornication”, which is a strong term, but in canonical language, it does not refer to prostitution, but rather to the bodily dishonor of a union made outside the proper order. A person who enters into a third marriage is not excommunicated but is subjected to a severe penance: eight years of repentance. In the context of the time, this involved strict fasting, exclusion from Communion, and a life of publicly recognized correction. Furthermore, the legal text serves as an invitation to responsibility and humility.

In essence, the Sacrament of Marriage cannot be treated as a repeatable relationship without consequence. When a bond is broken multiple times, we can no longer speak of a wedding in the full sense of the word, but rather of a union that requires responsibility and repentance.

The Church does not close its doors to those who fall, but it also does not call “light” what has already become “shadow.”

Chapter 83 confirms this position, adding that even a fourth marriage is forbidden, a rule that expresses, with severity, the Church’s stance toward repeated remarriage, which it considers a serious violation of moral and spiritual order. In the view of the compilers of the Govora Nomocanon, marrying four times is seen as a disguised form of debauchery, which is why it is punished with penance and prohibition. The prescribed canon, eight years of repentance and 110 prostrations per day, reveals the gravity of the sin. It is a harsh canon, intended to restore inner balance and confront the person with their own disorder. Prostrations are acts of prayer and active repentance, through which both body and soul are called to humility. The phrase “they fornicate and anger God” conveys the idea that excessive remarriages violate the order established by God. Marriage, as a Sacrament of the Church, cannot be repeated indefinitely without distorting its meaning.

Without claiming to exhaust the regulations concerning the family, the final part of this study addresses

another issue regulated by the Govora Nomocanon: that of mixed marriages. Specifically, Chapter 33 states: “Whoever marries into another faith, daughters or sons, shall do penance for five years; likewise, the priests who marry them shall also do penance for three years outside the church” (Bujoreanu 1885 III, 100).

It must be noted that until the end of the first millennium, mixed marriages were prohibited by the Church, with the main scriptural justification being 1 Corinthians 7:39: “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” and 2 Corinthians 6:14–15: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”.

Several Orthodox Church canons speak on mixed marriages: canon 14 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; canon 72 of the Quinisext (Trullan) Council, in which the prohibition of mixed marriages is theologically justified; canons 10 and 31 of the Local Council of Laodicea; canon 21 of the Local Council of Carthage; canon 23 of St. John the Faster.

The general rule that emerges from these canonical texts is that marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian is forbidden (Dură 1988, 96–100). But the Canon 72 trullan provides a pastoral exception: in cases where a marriage was already concluded between two heterodox individuals, and one of them later converts to Orthodoxy, and if both spouses agree to continue living together, the Church will not separate them (Dură 1984, 404-416). This is based on the Pauline exhortation to the Corinthians, according to which “the husband is sanctified through the wife and the wife through the husband”. This principle was asserted by canon 31 of Laodicea.

It is important to emphasize that the holy canons prohibit any union between a Christian and a non-Christian for a practical reason as well: in the first millennium, the rite of Holy Matrimony was united with the Divine Liturgy, and receiving the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, was the central act of religious marriage. Hence the strictness regarding the acceptance of religious marriages in the Church.

After the year 1054, a distinction was made regarding mixed marriages, which were divided into interreligious marriages (between a Christian and a non-Christian) and interconfessional marriages (between an Orthodox Christian and another Christian who is not Orthodox), the latter being treated with more leniency (*oikonomia*).

This position is also reflected in the stance adopted by the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete (2016), which rejected interreligious marriages (Dură 2019b, 39-55). As for interconfessional marriages, although the synodal fathers stated that from a canonical standpoint, these are forbidden, they also acknowledged that, by applying the principle of *oikonomia*, hierarchs may grant a dispensation to allow the celebration of marriage between an Orthodox and a non-Orthodox Christian.

In the text of the Govora Nomocanon, mixed marriage is prohibited. The regulation in Chapter 33 is based on Byzantine canon law and the patristic tradition, according to which the union between an Orthodox and a non-Orthodox is, in essence, a deviation from the faith, equivalent to a form of partial apostasy or a weakening of Orthodox conscience.

It should not be overlooked that, in the era when the Nomocanon was drafted (1640), in Wallachia there were constant contacts between Orthodox believers and other Christian groups (Catholics, Protestants) or non-Christians (Muslims). The risk of religious syncretism or the dilution of Orthodox identity was perceived as real. Consequently, the regulation does not only condemn the act of marrying someone of a different faith, but also applies to the priest who consents to officiate such a wedding. Thus, the sin is personal, but it is also regarded as a disruption of liturgical order. The priest who participates in such a deviation becomes complicit in it.

The penance prescribed for those who marry non-Orthodox individuals is five years, a long period, comparable to penances imposed for serious transgressions, such as fornication or oath-breaking. This indicates the gravity of the matter.

Marriage is defiled through a breach in the communion of faith, which lies at the very foundation of the sacrament. Eucharistic communion is the full unity of the Church, and marriage naturally implies the shared partaking of the Holy Gifts by the spouses. Marriage to a person of another faith breaks this unity and becomes an obstacle to salvation.

The priest is punished with three years of penance “outside the church,” meaning that he is suspended from liturgical service and Eucharistic participation, equivalent to a temporary canonical suspension. This penalty demonstrates that the Church does not tolerate the celebration of the Sacrament outside the required dogmatic conditions. Even if the ceremony were outwardly “correct,” the lack of unity in faith nullifies the validity of the act.

Therefore, the regulation is noteworthy in that it examines marriage as a sacramental work inseparable from the unity of faith. Any departure from this unity is treated as a wound inflicted on the Body of the Church, and thus requires both canonical correction and repentance.

Conclusions. The Govora Nomocanon contains, within its text, several provisions that regulate the institution of the family. Among the addressed aspects are matrimonial prohibitions (marriage between blood relatives or those in a spiritual kinship), rules concerning consent in marriage, the discipline of spouses, the father's authority over his children, the punishment of adultery, and remarriage after widowhood or separation. These norms were aimed at protecting the moral integrity of the family and maintaining communal order, being grounded, among other sources, in canonical regulations.

At the same time, the adoption of such provisions stands as testimony to the fact that, in the legal tradition of the seventeenth century, marriage was regarded as a sacramental act, based on mutual consent, yet also dependent on parental approval and adherence to ecclesiastical canons. Violations of the rules regarding kinship degrees or unjustified remarriage attracted both ecclesiastical sanctions (penitential canons) and legal penalties (corporal punishment or confiscation of property).

The family was seen as a small church, where Orthodox values were nurtured, and parents bore the responsibility for the moral formation of their children. The village priest or the monastery confessor often played a mediating role in family conflicts and provided spiritual oversight for the relationships between spouses.

In conclusion, in the Govora Nomocanon, the family was both perceived and regulated as a fundamental institution, where traditional and religious values intersected with the legal norms of the time. This perspective reflects a society in which family stability was closely tied to social stability and the observance of juridical and canonical norms, and where disorder within the family was considered a threat to the entire community.

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