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XXIV.23 On feast days

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXIV. On laws in their relation with religion, considered in its doctrines and in itself -

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When the religion commands the cessation of work, it should be more mindful of men's needs than of the greatness of the being it honors.

In Athens, the excessive number of feast days was a great problem. [1] This dominant people, to whom all the cities in Greece brought their quarrels, could not manage to deal with them all.

When Constantine instituted Sunday as a day of rest, he made that ordinance for the cities [2] and not for the people in the countryside : he realized that in the cities were labors that were useful, and in the countryside labors which were necessary.

For the same reason, in the countries which support themselves by trade, the number of feast days must be relative to that trade itself. Protestant countries and Catholic countries are situated [3] in such a way that labor is more needful in the former than in the latter ; the suppression of feast days was therefore more compatible with the Protestant than the Catholic countries.

Dampier observes that peoples' diversions vary greatly with the climates. [4] Since warm climates produce an abundance of delicate fruits, barbarians, who find their requirements close at hand, spend more time entertaining themselves. The Indians of cold countries do not have so much leisure : they must fish and hunt continually, so there is less dancing, music, and feasting ; and were a religion to become established among those peoples, it ought to be mindful of that in its institution of feast days.

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[1] Xenophon on the republic of Athens.

[2] Law 3, Codex, *De feriis* ; this law was doubtless made only for pagans.

[3] Catholics are more towards the south and Protestants toward the north.

[4] *Nouveaux Voyages autour du monde*, vol. II.