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XXIV.24 On local laws of religion

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

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There are many local laws in the various religions ; and when Montezuma so insisted on saying that the Spaniards' religion was good for their country and Mexico's good for his, he was not uttering an absurdity, because indeed the legislators could not help but be mindful of what nature had established before them.

The opinion of metempsychosis is made for the climate of the Indies. The excessive heat dries up the whole countryside ; only a very few cattle can feed on it [1] ; there is a constant danger of a shortage of them for plowing ; oxen can be bred only passably ; they are subject to many diseases [2] ; a law that preserves them is thus highly appropriate for the good order of the country.

While the prairies are dried up, rice and pulses readily grow there with the waters that can be used for it ; a religious law that permits only this food is therefore very useful to men in these climates.

The flesh of livestock has no taste there, and the milk and butter they get from them makes up part of their subsistence [3] ; the law that forbids eating and killing cows is therefore not unreasonable in the Indies.

Athens encompassed an innumerable multitude of people ; its territory was barren ; it was a religious maxim that those who offered certain little presents to the gods honored them more than those who sacrificed oxen. [4]

[1] Bernier's *Travels*, vol. II, p. 137.

[2] *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, 12th volume, p. 95.

[3] Bernier's *Travels*, vol. II, p. 137.

[4] Euripides, in *Athenaeus*, book II. p. 40.