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XXV.2 On the motive of attachment for various religions

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXV. On laws in their relation with the establishment of religion and its external policy -

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The world's various religions do not give to those who profess them equal motives for attachment to them ; it depends greatly on the manner in which they mesh with men's way of thinking and feeling.

We are extremely prone to idolatry, and yet we are not strongly attached to idolatrous religions ; we are not at all prone to spiritual thoughts, and yet we are very attached to the religions that have us worship a spiritual being. This is explained by the satisfaction we find in ourselves for being intelligent enough to have chosen a religion that raises the deity from the humiliation where the others had placed it. We regard idolatry as the religion of crude peoples, and religion focused on a spiritual being as the religion of enlightened peoples.

When to the idea of a supreme spiritual being, which constitutes the doctrine, we can further join tangible notions that are part of the ritual, it gives us a strong attachment to the religion, because the motives of which we have just spoken are joined with our natural penchant for tangible things. And so it is that Catholics, who have more of this sort of ritual than Protestants, are more invincibly attached to their religion [1] than Protestants are to theirs.

When the people of Ephesus had learned that the Council fathers had decided they could call the Virgin "Mother of God," they were transported with joy [2] ; they kissed the bishops' hands, they embraced their knees ; everywhere acclamations rang out.

When an intellectual religion further gives us the thought of a choice made by the deity, and of a distinction between those who profess it and those who do not, this attaches us very much to that religion. Mohammedans would not be such good Muslims if, on the one hand, there were not idolatrous peoples who make them see themselves as the avengers of the oneness of God, and on the other Christians, to make them believe they are his preferred people.

A religion burdened by many practices [3] is more attaching than another which is less so : we hold firmly to things which occupy us continually, witness the tenacious obstinacy of Mohammedans [4] and Jews, and the ease of religious change of barbaric and savage peoples who, solely occupied by the hunt or war, bother little with religious practices.

Men are extremely prone to hope and fear, and could never choose a religion that had neither hell nor paradise. This is proven by the ease with which foreign religions have been able to implant themselves in Japan, and the zeal and love with which they have been received there. [5]

For a religion to be attaching, its morality must be pure. Men, knaves individually, are in the aggregate very honest people ; they love morality ; and if I were not treating such a grave subject, I would say that this appears admirably on the stage : one is sure to please the common people with sentiments that morality owns, and sure to shock them with sentiments it condemns.

When the outward ritual manifests great magnificence, it delights us and gives us much attachment for religion. We are greatly affected by the riches of the temples and the clergy. Thus the very misery of peoples is a motive which attaches them to this religion, which has served as pretext to those who have caused their misery.

[1] They are more zealous for its propagation.

[2] Letter of St. Cyril.

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[3] This does not contradict what I have said in the penultimate chapter of the previous book ; here I am talking about motives of attachment for a religion, and there about the means of making it more general.

[4] This can be observed throughout the world. See, on the Turks, the missions in the Levant, in *Recueil des voyages qui ont servi à l'établissement de la Compagnie des Indes*, vol. III, part I, p. 201 on the Moors of Batavia ; and Father Labat on Mohammedan Negroes, etc.

[5] The Christian and Indian religions : the latter have a hell and a paradise, whereas the religion of the Shintos has none.