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XXIV.1 On religions in general

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

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As we can judge among shadows which are the least dark, and among chasms which are the least deep, so we can seek among false religions those which are the most consistent with the welfare of society ; those which, though they have not the effect of leading men to the felicities of the afterlife, can contribute the most to their happiness in this one.

I shall therefore examine the various religions of the world only with respect to the good derived from them in the civil state, whether I speak of the one that has its root in heaven, or of those that have theirs on earth.

As in this work I am not a theologian but a political writer, there could be things that would be entirely true only in a human way of thinking, not having been considered with respect to more sublime truths.

It will require very little fairness to see that I have never pretended to make the interests of religion yield to political interests ; and to bring them together, one must know them.

The Christian religion, which commands men to love one another, no doubt wills that every people should have the best political laws and the best civil laws, because they are, next to itself, the greatest good that men can give and receive.