

## **Fyodor S. Wheeler**

**Title:** “Redemption by Revolution: The Cult of Reason Within the Religious History of France”

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**Fyodor S. Wheeler** is a junior history major and religious studies minor focusing on Western civilization and the history of the Christian Church. His first paper presented at the IPFW Undergraduate History Conference (2016) was “Empires of the Air: The Beginning of Radio,” at the 2016 conference. He currently serves as a tutor- not Tudor- for Western Civilization Part I.

### **Abstract**

"Redemption by Revolution: The Cult of Reason Within the Context of the Religious History of France" is an examination of the attempted dechristianization during the French Revolution (1789-1799). The revolutionaries' opposition to traditional religion is evaluated within the framework of France's unique religious history and expression of Christianity. Focusing on the Cult of Reason, this paper traces the roles of the Gallican Church and the Enlightenment in the development of an atheistic religion, and why it ultimately failed. At the center of this study is the Festival of Reason in 1793, which marked the installation of Reason as the figurehead of this new non-religion, scandalizing the country. The Cult of Reason has received little attention despite its reputation among historians as a bizarre and even shameful part of the Revolution, and even less attention has been paid to its religious significance. The general image of the Cult is of an atheistic religion, and the movement of which it was a part is oversimplified as the attempted transition from religion to rationalism. However, this interpretation obscures its place in the French Revolution and its culture. France's deeply ingrained religious nonconformity had existed long before the Revolution in the form of the Gallican Church, which was often at odds with the papal authority in Rome. This rejection of traditional authority combined with the Enlightenment ideals of Reason over superstition and Revolutionary opposition to the *ancien regime*, its power structure, and its longstanding tradition of religious intolerance. The result was a backlash against religion. This backlash is discussed within its philosophical and religious contexts, as the Cult of Reason can only be understood through this framework.

### **Bibliographical Note**

Primary sources consulted in this study include the works of Pierre Bayle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire along with royal French edicts and the religious scholarship of Clifford Geertz. Secondary sources include the scholarship of Christopher Dawson, Mona Ozouf, and Daniel Roche.