

David French, Kamala Harris and the Bizarre Story of a Failed Messiah

As an unashamedly pro-life Christian who believes “life begins at conception,” New York Times journalist David French has announced that, “I’m going to vote for Kamala Harris in 2024 and—ironically enough—I’m doing it in part to try to save conservatism.” With all respect to French, with whom I’ve dialogued privately about this, I find his position both indefensible and bizarre.

For my part, I am no starry-eyed adorer of former President Trump, for whom I voted twice.

In June 2022, I expressed my preference for another GOP candidate rather than Trump.

And on Jan. 6, 2021, as the Capitol riot was taking place, I stated that Trump was morally responsible for the mayhem, not because he intended for it to happen but because of his irresponsible rhetoric in the previous months.

In fact, Trump supporters who read my columns on a regular basis know that, to their dismay and even disgust, whenever I speak well of Trump’s accomplishments, I offer a series of caveats and disclaimers.

Still, no matter how much disdain French may have for Trump and his most ardent MAGA followers, I wholeheartedly reject the idea that a pro-life Christian can cast a vote for a candidate who is the most radical pro-abortion candidate in our nation’s history.

To vote for her is to support the possible federalizing of something worse than Roe, not to mention packing the Supreme

Court or changing it in other irreparable ways.

When it came to the ill-fated “pro-life evangelicals for Biden,” whom I also took to task, they naively felt that they could influence Biden to change his point of view. They were sadly disappointed and ultimately dismantled their website.

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French’s approach is somewhat different, arguing that there were fewer abortions under recent Democratic presidents than Republican presidents, as if voting for a pro-abortion candidate is the key to reducing abortions.

For French, though, the ultimate goal is undoing the damage done to the conservative movement by Donald Trump, under whose leadership the GOP has now gutted its pro-life and pro-family platforms. And in order to hasten that change, French will vote for Harris.

That leads me to the tragic story of the failed mystical Messiah Shabbetai Tzvi (1626-1676). Hailing from Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey), his Messianic claims ignited the Jewish world as he amassed a large following, including some of the leading rabbis of his day along with many wealthy and prominent Jews. Could Tzvi be the long-awaited deliverer?

Confident in his mission and calling, he traveled to Constantinople, demanding that the sultan, the leader of the Ottoman Empire, acknowledge his kingship and rule. Instead, Tzvi was imprisoned, where his Messianic fame continued to grow as he entertained visitors from around the world.

Eventually, the sultan had enough with all the drama, demanding that Tzvi convert to Islam or die. Shockingly, he chose to convert, justifying his actions with reference to rabbinic traditions connected with the coming of the Messiah.

According to these traditions, the Messiah would come when the world was either totally righteous or totally unrighteous. Tzvi reasoned that, since the world did not prove worthy of accepting him, he would convert to Islam, thereby hastening the final apostasy. (What a convenient way to save his life.)

Yet even that is not the end of the story.

Some of his followers followed suit and also converted to Islam in an effort to hasten the redemption, actually forming a sect within Islam called the Donmeh—a sect that apparently still exists to this day. These sectarians lived fully as Muslims but secretly practiced certain Jewish rites, along with reciting daily prayers in recognition of Tzvi as the Messiah.

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Truth really is stranger than fiction.

Yet it was the story of Tzvi's conversion to Islam that came to mind when I learned that French would be voting for Vice President Harris.

To be sure, I do not equate his vote for Harris with a full-blown apostasy to Islam, as was the case with Tzvi. But the idea that, by voting for someone like Harris (something that, to my knowledge, French would never have countenanced before his Never-Trump days), French would somehow help hasten the restoration of a truly conservative movement strikes me as similar to the logic of Tzvi. In the sarcastic words of Paul (which he quotes only to reject), "Let us do evil that good may result" (Rom. 3:8b).

French wrote:

I'm often asked by Trump voters if I'm "still conservative,"

and I respond that I can't vote for Trump precisely because I am conservative. I loathe sex abuse, pornography and adultery. Trump has brought those vices into the mainstream of the Republican Party. I want to cultivate a culture that values human life from conception through natural death. Yet America became more brutal and violent during Trump's term. I want to defend liberal democracy from authoritarian aggression, yet Trump would abandon our allies and risk our most precious alliances.

Obviously, I could push back against some of the broad strokes with which French paints here, also asking if he really believes that a Harris presidency would do more to stand with Israel, to stand against China and to secure our borders. But as one who also grieves over the deleterious effects of the Trump presidency, in particular as his presidency negatively affected the witness of the evangelical church, I'm not here to defend Trump.

I can only say that French's defection to the Democratic side for the purpose of helping to restore a conservative GOP, even if his defection is only for one election, is eerily reminiscent of the spiritual descent of Shabbetai Tzvi.

Had French simply encouraged Christians not to vote for Trump so as to pave the way for his defeat, rather than casting a vote for the most left-leaning, pro-abortion candidate in our nation's history, he would have made a much more credible case.

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