The religious evolution of President Javier Milei

“The transition to Judaism by President [Milei] signifies an incomprehensible step backward. It is reasonable for a Jew to become a Christian, not the other way around. … Talmudic Judaism has aspired to dominate the world: a secular and distorted realization of the vocation promised to Abraham and his offspring. … With all due respect, it is likely that, just as [Milei] did not understand Christianity, he may not grasp Judaism either. … I offer to discuss religious matters with the president. An intelligent person like him could understand the doctrinal universe of Catholicism and reconsider his inclination toward Judaism. Excerpts from the article ‘Presidential Apostasy’ by Hector Aguer, former archbishop of La Plata, Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA. See the full article here (https://infovaticana.com/blogs/cigona/importante-articulo-del-arzobispo-emerito-aguer/)

UNINTENTIONAL ANTI-SEMITISM A few days ago, in one of the many chat groups I participate in, I read an article written by the former archbishop of La Plata, Héctor Aguer. The emeritus archbishop refers there to the ‘incomprehensible’ religious transition of the Argentine president, Javier Milei, from Catholicism, the religion of his childhood, to Judaism. My chat friends pointed out this article as yet another example of anti-Semitism in the media. I refuse to label it as such. To be clear: there is no doubt that the archbishop is not fond of Judaism. There is no doubt that he repeats anti-Semitic nonsense, such as the Talmud aspiring for Jews to dominate the world, but beyond these absurdities, Aguer focuses on the abandonment of the theological doctrines of his faith and the inexplicable presidential ‘regression’ toward Judaism. The number one principle of Christianity—its raison d’être—is that the church came to replace Judaism. That the Torah—which Milei

admires—has already expired. The church literally proclaimed itself as ‘the new Israel’ and created an update of the Torah: the New Testament, which practically cancels the Old Testament, invalidating all its rules and commandments. The plan worked. Except for one small detail: the Jews, the supposedly replaced, did NOT disappear from the map! They resisted conversion, even under the threat of death. The church, for its part, did everything possible to make this happen: they demonized, humiliated, exiled, and persecuted them. Converting a Jew was not just another exercise in universal proselytism. Converting a stubborn Jew meant for the church a desperate act of legitimizing its most basic dogmas. Because as long as practical, uncanceled, and relevant Judaism existed, the legitimacy of its replacement—the church—was in doubt. And that’s why President Milei’s Jewish inclination is a terrible theological nightmare for Aguer. And his ‘doctrinal’ resentment toward Judaism is somehow indistinguishable from an unconscious anti-Semitic feeling. MILEI AND THE TORAH The former archbishop expresses a ‘mea culpa’ and views with eyes of failure that the president of his country is considering ‘regressing’ to ancient Judaism. For the archbishop, Milei simply slipped through their fingers! It wasn’t on the Argentine church’s radar because, as he explicitly writes, they didn’t think he would win the presidential election! Milei’s case was a colossal marketing error, according to Aguer, and to correct it, he kindly offers to talk to Milei to open his eyes and teach the president that Judaism has passed, or in doctrinal terms: it is obsolete. What surprises and hurts me the most is that it never occurs to Aguer that Milei might have discovered that the Torah is relevant, not only for his private spiritual life but also to inspire and guide his public service vocation. LAW, ORDER, AND PUBLIC SERVICE What could Javier Milei have found in the Torah that fascinated him? I will guess. Perhaps Milei is inspired that the Torah attributes the universal flood—the destruction of humanity—to the corruption of the most powerful: the ‘political caste’ that the Argentine president criticizes so

much. Perhaps Milei discovered in the biblical story of the flood the Noachide laws—universal—that for the first time in history defend the fetus's right to life (Gen 9:6). And besides promoting monotheism, they demand supreme respect for justice, strict honesty (kedé perutá), rejection of sexual immorality, and animal rights (eber min hajai), a point that seems to be very important in Milei's private life. Perhaps Milei is passionate about the biblical story of the young Moses who one day opened his eyes, observed the slavery of his people, and decided to leave the comfort of the palace to begin an implacable crusade against Pharaoh's corruption. Perhaps Milei identifies with the adult Moses, the leader who first formulated 'the ideas of freedom,' who led his people toward their independence, taught the world by his example the obligation to be transparent in public fund management (see here), and transmitted to his people a Divine constitution with 613 articles that are the basis of universal law and order, to this day. This Torah of Moses, which for Aguer 'expired,' contains precepts that promote the free market, demand unrestricted respect for private property, and—less known—establish a model of social justice based on personal solidarity (tsedaká, terumot, and ma'asrot) without state intermediation! All very relevant to the Argentina that Milei dreams of. Perhaps Milei found inspiration in the story of King Solomon, another Old Testament hero. The young king turned down the Divine offer of riches and honors and asked the God of Israel for wisdom to guide his people. To which Milei, in the best Talmudic style, comments: 'Wisdom to distinguish between good and evil, courage to choose the good, and temperance to persist on that path,' even though the whole world may be against it. Is it not possible that in the obsolete Torah of Moses, Milei has found an inexhaustible source of wisdom that not only inspires him personally but also politically; something that is not abundant in the New Testament, which completely delegates public administration to the Caesar of the moment? Is Archbishop Aguer sure he wants to talk to President Milei and dissuade him from his inclination

toward Judaism? Maybe he will discover that it is not Milei who is not seeing…

Rabbi Yosef Bitton