

# CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

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# Continuity and Change: The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Seminario and the Conservative Movement in Latin America

RICHARD FREUND



In November 2012, the *Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano* (Seminario or SRL for short) began celebrating a year devoted to the fiftieth anniversary of the Seminario and its work in Latin America. The celebration began with an evening at the Seminario in November 2012 and continued through October 2013, with a major community event in the famed Teatro Colón in downtown Buenos Aires.

I first wrote for *Conservative Judaism* on the occasion of the Seminario's thirtieth anniversary in 1992.<sup>1</sup> I subsequently wrote another article as a small tribute to Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, who can be credited with starting the Conservative Movement in Latin America.<sup>2</sup> When Rabbi Meyer passed away in December 1993, Judaism lost one of the clearest and strongest voices for Conservative Judaism and human rights worldwide. When I wrote both articles some twenty years ago, the Conservative Movement in Latin America was still fresh in my mind from my years at the Sem-

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inario, after Rabbi Meyer had returned to the United States in 1984. This article is intended to be an update of both articles, and to include reflections on the success and the ideological and intellectual foundations of the Movement in today's Latin America.

### The Seminario

Since I wrote my original articles in the early 1990s, much has changed at the Seminario. One major change of the past twenty years is that many of the roles that had been exclusively played by Rabbi Meyer at the Seminario from the 1960s through the 1980s are now staffed by a whole array of Latin American administrators. Another major change is in the governance: the Seminario is opening its Board to include members from many different Latin-American countries (including Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, and others), and a new organizational infrastructure is being built. The Board of today's Seminario is headed by Gabriel Myster, who was a student in the Seminario in the 1980s. The professional leadership resides in the office of an Executive President and CEO; this position is currently held by Rabbi Ariel Stofenmacher, a graduate from the Seminario and an expert in management, who leads the board, staff, and faculty and oversees the day-to-day operations of the Seminario. Rabbi Stofenmacher has recruited a cadre of exceptionally creative faculty and staff, which oversees totally new programming and community relations, and he is assisted by Leandro Galanternik, a rabbinical student with an extensive business background<sup>3</sup> who is the Director of Planning and Development at the Seminario. The Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel Rabbinical School of the Seminario is directed by Rabbi Ernesto Yartah, who was born in Argentina and was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and has over a decade of pulpit experience in the United States. The Abarbanel School of Jewish Education at the Seminario, which confers undergraduate degrees in Jewish studies as well as teaching certificates, is overseen by an Argentinian rabbi, Silvana Kandel-Lamdan, who is a recent graduate of Hebrew Union

<sup>1</sup>"The Rabbinical Seminary of Latin America: The First 30 Years," in *Conservative Judaism* 44:2 (Fall 1992), pp. 67-78.

<sup>2</sup>"Somos Testigos—We Are Witnesses: The Liberation Theology of Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer," in *Conservative Judaism* 47:1 (Fall 1994), pp. 27-38.

<sup>3</sup>He studied Business Administration in Buenos Aires and has an MA in nonprofit management and leadership from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

