

Russell Moore leaves ERLC for Christianity Today

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS)—Russell Moore, embattled Southern Baptist ethicist and “Never Trumper,” is resigning as president of his denomination’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Moore will join the staff of *Christianity Today*—the leading evangelical magazine, founded by the late evangelist Billy Graham—as a public theologian.

In his new role, Moore will help launch a Public Theology Project and will serve as its leader, said Tim Dalrymple, president and CEO of *Christianity Today*.

That project will host events and gatherings about public theology and publish content, including Moore’s writing and his Signposts podcast.

“I’ve struggled with this decision, because my gratitude for the honor of serving the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is so deep. As I conclude my time serving Southern Baptists as ERLC president, I am filled with gratitude as well as excitement for the future,” Moore said.

Dalrymple said *Christianity Today* “could not be more pleased with the addition of Russell Moore” in his new role.

“Russell is indisputably one of the most significant evangelical voices of our time. He illuminates the relevance of the gospel to the whole of life, from everyday matters of faith to the great debates in our society and culture,” Dalrymple said.

“Importantly, he does all of this in a voice that demonstrates what we at

Christianity Today call beautiful orthodoxy, weaving together a deep commitment to the historic integrity of the church with a generous, charitable and humble spirit.”

Moore will begin his new role this summer.

“*Christianity Today* has meant a great deal to me in my faith journey,” Moore said. “I am thrilled to join the team and lead the Public Theology Project. We need to recover a theologically orthodox, intellectually credible, socially engaged, missiologically holistic, and generally connected witness for American evangelical Christianity. This is a critical moment, and the Public Theology Project is devoted toward that goal.”

Drew fire for criticism of Trump

Moore’s work as ERLC president has been increasingly overshadowed by friction over his criticism of former President Donald Trump, putting him at odds with many Southern Baptist and evangelical leaders.



Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission President Russell Moore (Karen Race Photography / BP File Photo)

In 2015, Moore called Trump an “arrogant huckster” who was unfit for office. Trump responded by labeling Moore “a nasty guy with no heart.”

Moore came to the ERLC in 2013 after serving as a dean, provost and theology professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky. He had earlier worked in ministry in his native Mississippi.

Known as the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, the ERLC, headquartered in Nashville, is “dedicated to engaging the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking to issues in the public square for the protection of religious liberty and human flourishing,” according to its mission statement.

Moore’s predecessor, Richard Land, held the post of ERLC president for 25 years, often using it to wage culture wars. Land retired after apologizing for plagiarizing and for making racially insensitive comments about the death of Trayvon Martin.

While conservative theologically and politically, Moore offered a friendlier face to cultural engagement for Southern Baptists. The father of two adopted sons, he promoted adoption and immigration reform and has been known for his love of country music stars Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard and for poet Wendell Berry.

But with the rise of Trump, Moore took on a more political profile, and his opposition to the president led some Southern Baptist megachurches to withhold their giving to the denomination while others called for the ERLC to be defunded. A move to cut funding for the commission failed in 2018.

Target of SBC Executive Committee

probe

Still, controversy remained. A recent task force report to the SBC Executive Committee labeled the ERLC “a distraction” for Southern Baptists.



Beth Moore, author and speaker, Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Matt Carter, pastor at Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, discuss preventing and dealing with sexual abuse within the church at the in the exhibit hall prior to the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention. (Photo / Kathleen Murray / SBC Newsroom)

David Prince, chair of the ERLC trustees, defended Moore after the report, saying the commission “has served Southern Baptists faithfully during a time of political, cultural and, in some cases, denominational chaos.”

Moore has largely remained quiet about the controversy over the role of the ERLC. Despite pushback, he remained steadfast in his criticism of Trump and called on him to resign after the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

The Baptist ethicist has also been an outspoken supporter of survivors of abuse in the Southern Baptist Convention and has called for Southern Baptists and other evangelicals to do more to heal racial divides in the church and the country.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Moore has encouraged evangelicals to get vaccinated—white evangelicals are least likely to do so, according to Pew Research—and has advised pastors on how to deal with vaccine hesitancy and congregational political divides exacerbated by the pandemic.

“It takes an equilibrium, it takes a patience with people who are having some trouble, while at the same time, not holding the rest of the congregation captive to what someone read online, what someone is talking about on Facebook right now,” Moore said during an “Evangelicals & COVID-19 Vaccine” online event in April. “That’s a very difficult balancing act.”