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News

Faith leaders praise Derek Chauvin's guilty verdicts, acknowledge work ahead

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations reacted swiftly to the verdicts.





People cheer after a guilty verdict was announced at the trial of former Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin for the 2020 death of George Floyd, Tuesday, April 20, 2021, in Minneapolis, Minn. Former Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin has been convicted of murder and manslaughter in the death of Floyd. (AP Photo/Morry Gash)

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By *RNS staff*

(RNS) — As the judge thanked jurors for their “heavy-duty jury service,” reactions had already begun to the three guilty verdicts in the trial of former Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd.

Chauvin, a white man, kept Floyd’s neck under his knee for more than 9 minutes, killing the Black man and sparking a national and global reckoning about race and police brutality.

In remarks Tuesday (April 20) after the verdicts, President Joe Biden spoke of how Floyd’s legacy should be about peace rather than violence.

“It’s my hope and prayer that we live up to the legacy,” the president said, with Vice President Kamala Harris standing nearby. “This can be a moment of significant change.”

Religious leaders and faith-related organizations reacted swiftly to the verdicts. Here’s a sampling:

Jemar Tisby, author of ‘How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice’

“This verdict will not bring George Floyd back, and we have yet to hear the actual sentencing, but for the moment, at least the blatant disregard for Black life did not get exacerbated by yet another failure of the courts. We have been holding so much in for so long. Now is a moment to feel what we feel. And there’s no ‘right’ emotion in moments like these. We need to make space for people to feel all kinds of ways. For now, though, I hope we as a people can do what George Floyd was not allowed to do — breathe.”

The Rev. Barbara Williams-Skinner, co-convener, National African American Clergy Network

“Praise God that former white police (officer) Derek Chauvin was found guilty on all charges for the public execution of a father, and brother, Mr. George Floyd. While I feel great relief, sadly, this verdict means that a Black person must be murdered in public, followed by massive global protests for justice to be done. Sadly, too, the policing system is still on trial and must be radically transformed so that Black lives matter ... then indeed, all lives will matter — Latino lives, Asian lives, Indigenous lives and White lives. We continue to pray for every Black and Brown mother whose unarmed son or daughter was killed by police and paid no price for it.”

[RELATED: Of terror and testimonies: Living through the Derek Chauvin trial](#)

The Rev. Jim Winkler, president, National Council of Churches

“I was able to see with my own eyes that Derek Chauvin was guilty of killing George Floyd and so, too, did the members of the jury. I pray this verdict will help advance the cause of racial justice even though we still have a long way to go.”

Bishop T.D. Jakes, author and Dallas megachurch pastor

“While we are delighted by the jury’s verdict, we are mindful that there’s still a lot of work ahead of us. Our criminal justice system remains deeply flawed. Black people disproportionately remain victims of police brutality and are more likely to be pulled over or cited for negligible or phantom traffic violations. Let us not relent in our efforts to press our local, state and federal elected officials for police reform, particularly as it relates to qualified immunity, bias training, de-escalation training and uniform hiring standards.

“My prayer is that this will ignite a safer society where justice is equally allocated to absolutely everyone irrespective of socio-economics, race, religion or gender. Thank you to the many officers who do not stoop to such atrocities and honestly work toward protecting us every day.”

Farhana Khera, executive director, Muslim Advocates

“The whole world saw George Floyd beg for breath, for his mother and finally for mercy before dying as Derek Chauvin’s knee was on his neck. The jury’s guilty verdict is a long-overdue measure of justice for the Floyd family. ... Further, we must all take drastic, immediate action to overhaul the law enforcement and justice systems that have allowed this violence to continue for so long.”

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

“Today’s decision has demonstrated yet again how far we have to go on our long march toward justice. The wounds of our past continue to bleed into our present reality and the tensions in American life — revealed by this terrible tragedy — have remind(ed) us that there will probably be another George Floyd and another Derek Chauvin.

“The remedy — politically and judicially speaking — is the blind eye of justice guiding our legislators and judges, but the remedy for the soul of America is empathy, understanding and love of one’s neighbor whatever the color of their skin.”

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

“The racist systems that have endured for more than 400 years perpetuate the brutalization of People of Color — including, all too often, by law enforcement. The heartbreaking fact is no verdict or sentence can bring back George Floyd to the loving arms of his family, nor all those who are killed by police. What today’s verdict can and must do is affirm that those who take human life callously must be held accountable for their actions.”

Sen. Raphael Warnock, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta

“First and foremost, I’m thinking about George Floyd’s children and his family, and I’m thankful that they received something that approaches justice today after the trauma they’ve endured — one we’ve seen visited upon Black people and communities of color time and time again, and that never becomes less painful.”

“As a voice for Georgians in the Senate, and as a Black man, I hope today’s verdict is the beginning of a turning point in our country where people who have seen this trauma over and over again will know it is possible to have equal protection under the law.”

Bishop John Stowe, president, Pax Christi USA

“This verdict respects both the rule of law and what the whole world watched on

video. More importantly it affirms what has been shouted on our streets for nearly a year, George Floyd's life matters, Black lives matter. Let us pray that a precedent has been set that will allow people of color to know that their lives are to be protected by law enforcement and that there will be consequences when they are not.”

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, Baltimore-Washington Conference, United Methodist Church

“Although the justice system has worked, there is still a family in pain over the unnecessary loss of their loved one. This is not a moment for celebration; it's a time for reflection for all those involved in the death of George Floyd and all that unfolded in those nine minutes and 29 seconds last May, which prompted the largest movement for human rights in our nation's history. It is a time for reflection on why justice is still elusive for far too many.

“The verdicts provide greater assurance for all Americans that life, regardless of ethnicity, is sacred, equal, and worthy. It bolsters the truth that each child of God inherently possesses rights that must be respected by everyone, including by those sworn to serve and protect our communities.”

The Rev. Bernice King, CEO of Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change

“Oh, that George Floyd were still alive.

But I'm thankful for accountability.

The work continues.

Justice is a continuum.

And America must bend with the moral arc of the universe, which bends toward justice.”

[RELATED: Bystanders in a digital age: The heroes of the Derek Chauvin trial](#)

The Rev. Walter Kim, president, National Association of Evangelicals

“While this verdict cannot bring back the life of George Floyd, we pray that it enables his family and our country to take one step further on the long and hard journey toward true justice and lasting peace.”

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice

“True justice would mean #GeorgeFloyd was still alive. It would mean we’d not have had to wait for this verdict with bated breath, so fearful that yet again a cop would get away with murdering a Black man. May this verdict bring even some small sense of peace to the Floyd family.”

Russell Moore, president, Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

“Grateful for justice rendered in Minneapolis. Let’s remember today the family of George Floyd. And let’s work together for a new era of racial justice and American hope.”

Rachel Laser, president, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

“Today a jury held Derek Chauvin accountable for the murder of George Floyd. We know this conviction is not even close to the end of the continued fight for justice. The larger injustice is the systemic racism that continues to infect every facet of our society. As an organization dedicated to freedom, democracy and equality, we join in solidarity with those fighting for racial justice. And we send our profound sympathies to the family and friends of George Floyd and many

others who have unjustly died at the hands of the police. This verdict marks a small step in a long road to systemic change, accountability and healing.”

Freedom From Religion Foundation

“Americans — white or Black, religious or freethinking — must speak up and demand not only justice for Floyd, but a national reckoning with racial profiling, police brutality, vigilantism and institutional indifference and racism. The jury verdict was a step toward this national reckoning.”

Shanene Herbert, director of American Friends (Quakers) Service Committee's Healing Justice program in Saint Paul, Minnesota

“The brutal murder of George Floyd is the consequence of a racist system that disproportionately targets people of color for violence, imprisonment and premature death. No matter the outcome of the trial, young people of color are living every day with the ongoing trauma of police violence, the militarization of our cities, tear gas invading their homes and brutality against protesters. Instead of this constant dehumanization, we need resources to help us heal and rebuild the beloved community we all deserve.”

Tarunjit Singh Butalia, executive director, Religions for Peace USA

“Today is an important stepping stone for racial justice in our country. We need to begin to heal our nation from its original sin of racism, and together we can and will. As people of faith we must always stand with the oppressed and struggle with them till we can truly become the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Episcopal Bishop of Washington Mariann Budde; Washington National Cathedral Dean Randolph Hollerith; the Rev. Leonard L. Hamlin, Sr., canon missionary of the cathedral; and the Rev. Robert W. Fisher, rector of St. John's

Church of Lafayette Square

“George Floyd’s tragic death has prompted a national reckoning on racial injustice, and rightfully so. Because of what the world witnessed, the will and awareness needed to bring change — in our institutions, our culture, our politics and yes, our hearts — is on the rise, and we give thanks to God for this glimmer of light in the shadow of suffering. Together we will find a way forward toward a more just society and God’s dream for us of beloved community. May God have mercy on us all, and order our steps in the ways of justice and peace.”

Evangelical Covenant Church

“The fact remains that George Floyd’s life was needlessly taken. George Floyd’s death illuminates a broader issue regarding the frequency with which deadly force is deployed by law enforcement against Black and Brown citizens and neighbors when alternative choices — non-lethal choices — could and should be made. This is not an indictment of all police officers. We know many serve with dignity, equity and selflessness, and we applaud them and commend their service. However, when an officer demonstrates disregard for human life, as was the case with Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd, law enforcement must be held accountable. We implore officers who serve with integrity and protect our communities to willingly lend their support and voice to hold other officers accountable whenever they abuse their power.”

Greg Sterling, dean, Yale Divinity School

“We have all waited with palpable anxiety for the jury verdict in the case of Derek Chauvin. We have feared there would be a repeat of what has taken place far too many times, when white police officers have been acquitted of crimes against African American members of our communities.

“Today, justice was served. Today, justice stands tall. We know there is still a great deal of work to do, however, before justice prevails across our country. May we each commit ourselves to liberation and justice for ALL.”

Council of American-Islamic Relations

GUILTY. Alhamdulillah. #DerekChauvin

Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, and Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

“Today, a jury found Derek Chauvin guilty of the murder of George Floyd. As we receive this result, we recall that God is the source of all justice, love and mercy. The death of George Floyd highlighted and amplified the deep need to see the sacredness in all people, but especially those who have been historically oppressed. Whatever the stage of human life, it not only matters, it is sacred.”

“Let us pray that through the revelation of so much pain and sadness, that God strengthens us to cleanse our land of the evil of racism which also manifests in ways that are hardly ever spoken, ways that never reach the headlines. Let us then join in the hard work of peacefully rebuilding what hatred and frustration has torn down. This is the true call of a disciple and the real work of restorative justice.”