

Nation introspective after verdict, L.A. riots

LOS ANGELES (CNS) — A controversial verdict and resulting racial violence in Los Angeles have left the ethnically diverse city with the task of rebuilding and a stunned nation in an introspective mood.

Catholic leaders across the nation expressed shock at the acquittals of four white police officers in the beating of a black motorist, and said they were stunned by the violence that followed announcement of the verdict.

Many said the acquittals only sparked the violence, and that the root of the strife was pervasive racial divisions in U.S. society and "deep-seated alienation and hopelessness" felt by the nation's poor.

After four days of violence resulting in at least 50 deaths and thousands of injuries and incidents of vandalism, Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony urged the city's residents to begin recapturing a "sense of what is morally right and wrong."

He said those who had looted stores during the disturbances could return stolen goods to Catholic churches, no questions asked.

The cardinal said the church would turn the goods over to authorities, who would return them to their rightful owners.

Cardinal Mahony made the unusual request at Sunday Mass May 3 in ravaged South Central Los Angeles.

After riots erupted April 29 in Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest city, thousands of residents of the city's poorest neighborhoods joined in a frenzy of looting and arson.

People could be seen walking down the streets in the middle of the day, loaded down with televisions, video-cassette recorders and clothing.

Cardinal Mahony also called for "a very determined effort to rebuild relationships" within the Los Angeles community. He pledged to continue to support the work of archdiocesan ethnic-ministry offices "to build better and stronger bridges and networks among all our peoples."

The cardinal called the Rodney King beating just "one glimpse" of the "enormous inequalities and injustice" in services, schools, jobs and employment opportunities in southern California.

President Bush was among leaders calling for prayer and unity to cope with the devastation in Los Angeles.

Auxiliary Bishop Carl A. Fisher of Los Angeles, one of 11 active black U.S. bishops, said his reaction to the

officers' acquittals was "a numbing, shocking feeling" shared by "all of us who have seen the filming with such frequency."

The violent reaction by residents of central Los Angeles "indicated deep-seated alienation and hopelessness," said the bishop, who rode with police through South Central Los Angeles the first night after the violence began.

Protest leaders "were out to incinerate that area. Why that area? Now the people there will suffer even more. Nothing will be resolved through destruction of human lives and property," Bishop Fisher said.

The verdict was "merely the spark that ignited" racial tensions that had been smoldering since the Watts riots of 1965, according to Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Francis of Newark, N.J., who lived in Watts at that time.

"Relations between the races in Los Angeles have not improved (since 1965), and have actually worsened," said Bishop Francis, another of the nation's black bishops. He attributed the problem in part to "the arrogance of some law-enforcement officials."

Thirty-four people were killed and about 4,000 arrested during the 1965 riots in the Watts section of Los Angeles. The riots grew from a scuffle between a black motorist and a white California Highway Patrol officer.

Bishop Francis criticized the system that had left it to an all-white jury in Simi Valley, Calif., to decide the fate of the four officers. He described the jurors as "pawns in the hands of the establishment."

The verdict illustrated that "the stereotypes that have continued for years continue to persist in our society — blame the victim," said Jerome Ernst, executive director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice.

Bishop Joseph L. Howze of Biloxi, Miss., asked God to "give us the courage and enlightenment to commit ourselves to ridding our communities, nation and world of the twin scourges of poverty and racism that so often erupt in the violence we are witnessing."

In an April 30 statement, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago said that he was "stunned and perplexed" by the King verdict. He condemned "the climate of racism and violence that surrounds this case" and said that climate was felt "not only in Los Angeles but also here in the Chicago area."

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy of Seattle said Christians must "demand



ON GUARD — A National Guardsman stands among the rubble of a ravaged business district at Vermont Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles April 30, the second day of rioting in the city.

a justice system that truly offers justice" and "avoid recrimination, retaliation and violence."

"But that is not enough.... We can no longer tolerate the racism we all know exists in our communities and, perhaps, in our hearts," he said. "Let us pray and work for peace and healing. But let us also pray and work for the courage and commitment to overcome the injustice that stands in the way of true reconciliation."

Cardinal Mahony sent a letter by facsimile to Pope John Paul II, asking him "to keep the City of Angels very much in your prayers ... in the midst of our turmoil."

Responding in a telegram, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano said the pope "was deeply saddened to learn of the violence which has erupted in Los Angeles.

"His Holiness entrusts all the people

of Los Angeles to the loving intercession of the Mother of God and the watchful protection of His holy angels," the telegram said.

Los Angeles church officials and parish priests had reported no injuries or damages to church property, although structural fires and looting near several churches in the affected areas were reported.

A thrift shop and appliance store four blocks from the Los Angeles archdiocesan chancery burned to the ground the morning after the verdict. Plumes of smoke from the fires in South Central Los Angeles could be seen from the offices of *The Tidings*, Los Angeles' archdiocesan newspaper.

St. Vibiana Cathedral, a few blocks from the site of further rioting at downtown police headquarters, suffered no damage, said Monsignor Terrence Fleming, cathedral rector.

Politicians try to achieve elusive peace in N. Ireland

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (CNS) — Protestant and Catholic politicians sat down April 29, trying once again to devise a formula for peaceful self-rule in Northern Ireland.

Almost 3,000 people have been killed in the province since 1969, and observers fear that failure in this round of talks could spark another bloody upsurge in one of the world's longest-running guerrilla conflicts.

Despite their mutual suspicions, Northern Ireland's political leaders are trying to return the province to self-government after 18 years of direct rule from London.

The politicians, whose last session

around the negotiating table collapsed last July, have been given three months by the London and Dublin governments to come up with a power-sharing formula.

But moderate Unionists fear that fiery Protestant preacher-politician Ian Paisley could torpedo the talks in drawn-out procedural wranglings.

On the eve of the discussions at the Stormont parliamentary buildings overlooking Belfast, Protestant extremists battling to keep Northern Ireland British shot and killed a Catholic woman in a Belfast pharmacy.

Police called the attack "naked sec-

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RAIL BOMB — Northern Ireland police search for clues beside the ruins of a border security checkpoint in Killeen, Northern Ireland on May 1. An Irish Republican Army bomb planted aboard a rail car exploded as it passed the checkpoint Friday, killing a British soldier and wounding five others.