

A far-fetched fable of bishops and baseball

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Joseph "Ducky" Medwick was a great and colorful baseball player in the 1930s and '40s, spending almost all of his 17 years in the major leagues with the St. Louis Cardinals and the Brooklyn Dodgers.

In 1937, Medwick led the National League with 237 hits, 56 doubles, 31 home runs, 154 RBI, and a .374 batting average. He had a remarkably robust .324 lifetime batting average, and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1968.

The (imaginary) Archdiocese of New Bristol, Conn., has an auxiliary bishop named Dallas ("Ducky") Medwick, who got his nickname from that celebrated National League outfielder.

For years, even those who disagreed with Dallas Medwick's progressive theology and his free-wheeling approach to pastoral life warmly referred to him as "Ducky."

Although Bishop Medwick's ultra-liberal views have been widely known for years within the bishops' conference and the theological community, very few outside those groups have even heard of his name, much less his ideas. But now all that is changed.

Dallas ("Ducky") Medwick has become an instant celebrity. He's the bishop who spent 10 days in jail for participating in a demonstration against the apartheid laws of South Africa.

During his brief jail term, the bishop verbally clawed one of the giants of the corporate world, former Treasury Secretary William Simon. Simon had co-chaired a committee of conservative Catholic laity, which produced an alternative pastoral letter to the U.S. bishops' 1986 pastoral on the economy.

The huge headline in the tabloid *New Bristol Post* practically screamed the news: "Jailed Bishop to Simon: You're Risking Hell."

In an interview conducted from his jail cell, Bishop Medwick characterized Simon as "a Sunday Catholic" whose "position" on social and economic justice may send

him "straight to hell."

He then compared the former treasury secretary to the rich man in the Gospel "who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day," but who ignored the cries of poor Lazarus at his gate, "covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table" (Luke 16:19-21).

During a sermon at St. Malachy's Cathedral soon after his release from jail, Bishop Medwick expressed surprise that so much attention had been paid to his remarks about the former treasury secretary and current investor par excellence.

"All I was saying is what he learned, and I learned, and all of you learned in the first grade: 'For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God' (Luke 18:25)."

What Bishop Medwick learned in the first grade I can't account for. But he sure-

ly must have been taught somewhere in his seminary studies that rash judgment, that is, the act of assuming God's place in judging the state of another person's soul, can itself be seriously sinful.

Bishop Sebastiano Montanaro of the neighboring Diocese of Brookline, Mass., showed himself more theologically astute than Bishop Medwick, whom the cardinal-archbishop of New Bristol had described as "one of the finest theologians going."

When asked about Bishop Medwick's remarks, Bishop Montanaro replied: "I do not think that we are in the position to judge the final punishment a person will receive because of that individual's actions in this life. We must leave that judgment in the hands of a merciful God."

Cardinal O'Donnell had prudently withheld comment about the controversy — but only for awhile. The urge to speak proved irresistible, even though His Eminence surely recognized from the start the lose/lose nature of the dilemma in

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which his auxiliary bishop had placed him.

A criticism of Bishop Medwick, however mild, would be interpreted as a softening of the cardinal's own strong stand against social and economic injustice. A word of support, on the other hand, would implicate him in the act of rash judgment against Simon.

Unfortunately, the cardinal stepped into the trap and it closed hard around his ankle.

Reasonable and fair-minded people are beginning to think that the only public officials and public personalities our bishops are willing to criticize are super-rich conservatives such as Simon. Poor people get a free ride, and so do those liberal politicians who fight on their behalf.

Here endeth the fable.

Jesus saves tormented 'maniac' from evil spirits

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Hey, watch out down there! That maniac is on the loose again," a man on the hillside called to Jesus and his apostles. He came down to the shore where they had just stepped from their boat.

"Who were you talking about?" Jesus asked him.

"They say his own mother placed a curse on him the day he was born. That's why a devil has taken possession of his soul. This man has terrorized the people of Gerasa for as long as I can remember. Even those who used to care for him have abandoned him. Now he lives in the tombs among the dead. Even my pigs are afraid of him," he said as he pointed to the herd on the hillside.

While the man was still speaking to Jesus and his apostles, a huge rock was suddenly hurled at them from a cave in the hillside.

"Watch out, Lord!" Peter shouted.

"It's him," the pig herder told them.

"There's nothing to be done. My advice to



you is to leave this place."

All at once, a man emerged from the cave and rushed toward them on the beach. He flung himself at the feet of Jesus and cried, "Jesus, Son of God, what do you want with me? Don't punish me because of them."

"What is your name?" Jesus asked.

"My name is Legion," he said because there were many spirits tormenting him. "Don't send me away." He noticed the pig herder standing there. "Let the spirits go into the pigs there on the hillside."

Jesus placed his hand on the man's head and prayed. As everyone watched, the pigs began to race toward the cliff. More than 2,000 pigs rushed over it into the lake and

were drowned.

"What have you done? My pigs!" the herder cried and ran to the town for help. A short time later, the herder returned with a huge crowd of people. They could hardly believe what they saw. The man who had been afflicted all of his life sat placidly by Jesus listening to him.

Someone from the crowd came forward to Jesus, saying "We are afraid of what happened here today. Please leave our town at once."

It was the man who had been cured by Jesus who answered, "No! You mustn't send Jesus away. Don't you know who he is? Can't you see what he has done for me?"

Jesus was already getting back into the boat with his apostles. "Let me come with you," the man said running after them.

"No, I want you to go and tell everyone what God has done for you," Jesus told him.

Scripture reference: Mark, Chapter 5:1-20.

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