

OLD-TIME BIGOT IS DEAD

[Bill Donohue](#)

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I asked some young staffers if they ever heard of Jimmy Swaggart. As expected, they had not. He was an old-time anti-Catholic bigot who made it big, and then had a major fall from grace. He died July 1. The Pentecostal televangelist was 90. His cousins were Mickey Gilley and Jerry Lee Lewis, two accomplished entertainers.

On August 21, 2006, we received a fax from a man who wrote, "My mother-in-law—a Pentecostal subscribes to this magazine [he sent a copy of 'The Evangelist'], and this has to be one of the many reasons she thinks her daughter is lost because her daughter, my wife, is now Catholic. Jimmy Swaggart is spreading anti-Catholic articles to his subscribers of the magazine, 'The Evangelist.'"

The man was right. Swaggart was an inveterate anti-Catholic bigot (he also lashed out at other Protestants and Jews).

In the 1980s, Swaggart said, "I maintain that the Catholic superstructure and organization is not really a Christian organization. Its claims are false." He constantly bashed the pope, saying he was "the most evil man alive." In one of his tracts, "A Letter to My Catholic Friends," he said of his "friends" that they are "poor pitiful individuals who think they have enriched themselves spiritually by kissing the pope's ring"; he urged them to leave the Church.

Catholics were idolaters. As proof, he said, they participate in "Mary-worship." Their belief in Purgatory, he argued, "provided the Catholic Church with a very effective means to rake heaping piles of money into its coffers." The Church was guilty of "greed," the quest for "political power," and

promoting the “the cult of Peter.”

Swaggart proved to be such an influential bigot that several TV stations, including Boston and Atlanta, dropped his show in the mid-1980s. However, he was still seen in 550 outlets nationwide.

In the end, what finished him was not his anti-Catholicism. He was photographed visiting a prostitute in New Orleans. After an investigation by the Assemblies of God, he went on TV to beg for forgiveness and apologized to his wife. But his apology proved to be insincere: he was later caught with another hooker.

The genre of anti-Catholicism that Swaggart represented is no longer predominant. His theological animus against the Catholic Church has been eclipsed by militant secularists. They are bent on privatizing, if not destroying, Catholicism. Just as mean-spirited, they are much better educated, and are therefore much more dangerous. In fact, they occupy most of the command posts in America, especially those that specialize in the dissemination of ideas (e.g., education, the media and publishing).

Swaggart is history. May his family come to terms with his legacy.