

Jonathan Edwards' collected works now available for download

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NEW HAVEN, Conn. (RNS) The collected works of Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century preacher and one of America's most famous theologians, are now available for download thanks to Logos Bible Software. But for those who don't want to cough up \$1,289.95 to purchase them, there's good news: The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale Divinity School lets you view them online for free.

The colonial preacher was instrumental in America's Great Awakening and is known for fiery sermons such as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The 26-volume collection, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, comprises more than 10,000 sermons, articles and letters that were indexed from 1953 to 2008.

"Edwards is widely recognized as one of the most important American thinkers and religious figures and as a major figure in the history of Christian thought," said Kenneth Minkema, executive director of Yale's Jonathan Edwards Center.

"Publication of his works is important for providing resources for those, such as students, who wish to learn for the first time about his influences, thought and legacies."

The release of Edwards' work is more than a historical contribution. It comes at a moment of renewed interest in the preacher, especially among conservative evangelicals and "New Calvinists," mostly evangelicals who are acolytes of Edwards' brand of Calvinist theology.

According to Minkema, there are more than 4,000 books, articles, dissertations and other writings on Edwards, and they keep coming from publishing houses.

George Marsden, professor emeritus of history at the University of Notre Dame and author of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, has also noticed newfound interest in Puritan thinkers like Edwards among some modern Christians.

Among the contributing factors, he cites the influence of Edwards and Calvinism on prominent evangelical pastors such as Timothy Keller of New York City's Redeemer Presbyterian Church and John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis who seek to imbue their brand of Christianity with more intellectual and theological heft.

"Evangelicalism has brought many people to Christian faith during the past generations, but many find the tradition to be a bit thin theologically and intellectually," Marsden said. "Calvinism provides them with a very substantial intellectual and theological heritage."

Douglas Sweeney, professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School outside Chicago, said many modern-day believers are rediscovering Christianity's traditions and roots. In recent decades, many churches focused on trying to be culturally relevant, throwing off dusty hymns and rituals to embrace more modern, hipper worship experiences. Many now seek to re-connect with older forms of the faith.

“Modern evangelicalism was so pragmatic ... for much of the 19th and 20th centuries that its roots in the tradition shriveled up,” said Sweeney, author of *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word*. “Evangelicals today are into church history again, seeking nourishment for their faith.”

Even so, some question whether a full embrace of 18th-century Puritan thinking will work in a 21st-century context. Can a message that focuses on the damnation of sinners and torments of hell awaken the modern masses like it did for Edwards and others? Today’s preachers are working in a pluralistic culture that Edwards never could have imagined.

Regardless, the release of Edwards’ work is a boost for devotees who think his message didn’t die with him in 1758.

“The Yale project has been tremendously influential in enhancing Edwards’ study,” Marsden said, “and it is the availability of the whole range of his works that has helped many people realize that Edwards stands among the top Christian theologians of all time.”