



Awake, Thou Spirit, Who Didst Fire

Text: Karl Heinrich von Bogatzky (1690-1774)

Tune: Nikolaus Decius (1490-1541)

In the weeks after Trinity, the focus of the Church Year is not as much on events in Christ's life, but on our life in the Church. Occasionally the texts take on a "missions" feel—Our Lord telling of the spread of His Word to all men. In those times, it is appropriate to sing "Missions" hymns, hymns which focus on the spread of God's Word to all the world. "Awake, Thou Spirit, Who Didst Fire" is one of our "Missions" hymns which speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit to spread this Word throughout the world.

The hymn was written by Karl Heinrich von Bogatzky. He was born September 7, 1690 near Militsch, Silesia. His father was descended from a noble Hungarian family, and he attained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Austrian service. Karl hoped to follow in his father's footsteps, but chronic illness prevented that aspiration from coming to fruition. His education as a child happened at various places as the family moved for military reasons. His longest stay was at the Ducal Court of Weissenfels. However, after that stay, his father hoped Karl could attempt to enter military service, so the family was moved to Breslau. However, Karl fell very ill and the state would not allow him to enter. After this rejection, he became convinced that God had other work for him. He received an offer of assistance from Count Heinrich XXIV of Reuss-Kostritz and that allowed him to enter the University of Jena in 1713 to study law. At Easter 1715 he transferred to Halle. While at Halle, at Christmas of 1715 he received word that his mother died in Silesia. Preparing to leave, he began an earnest study of the Word and made increased use of the Sacraments. In this time of increased church attendance, he came to understand the truth of the Doctrine of Justification, and resolved to enter into the service of the Church. However, for this and for his inability to enter the army, his father disowned him. At

Easter 1716 he finally returned to Halle, but transferred to the study of theology rather than law. In this year, he began what became his greatest work, *Das güldene Schatzkästlein*



The title page of Bogatzky's *Golden Treasury* in one of its early British publications.

der Kinder Gottes ("The Golden Treasury for the Children of God"), a children's devotional book that was popular in England for several generations of children. Soon after, in 1718, his health failed again and because of it he was mostly unable to speak. Because of this, he was prevented from any kind of preaching work, so he turned to religious authorship and some small private speaking engagements. This turn took him back to his home in Silesia.

His hymn writing began about this same time. He wrote 411 hymns (though only this one is in our hymnal). Many were never published in hymnals, but were used as poems in his devotional works. However, he was instrumental in a hymnal for the Church in Cöthen.

"Awake, Thou Spirit, Who Didst Fire" was originally a 14-stanza hymn. What we have is stanzas 1, 3, 5, and 7. The hymn's original title was "For faithful laborers in the Harvest of the Lord, for the blessed spread of the Word to all the world." One interesting translation note is the altered translation at the end of stanza four. In our hymnal it reads "Oh, spread the conquest of Thy Word and let Thy kingdom come, dear Lord." It is actually:

Ja, wecke doch auch Israel bald auf Wake Israel from his sleep, O Lord
Und also segne deines Wortes Lauf! And spread the conquest of Thy Word

This "Missions" hymn puts missions in its proper context. It is not *our* work of spreading the Gospel, but rather the *Holy Spirit* at work in the Word. The Church simply preaches the Gospel and the Holy Spirit does the work of spreading it. This hymn is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to give courage to the preacher and to work in the Word so that "Thy children's hearts are stirred" and come to know their Savior, Jesus Christ.