

Traditional Lyric

Bruce Elliot Alford

The house of God, a shield and shelter
served us well and all appeared in place—
vermillion seats, silver coins and collection
plates payed out along the row

We were tedious, clapping
worshipping beauty and spirit, and
did not play with fears or ask if anyone
was there

Out in the field, children pick okra
that pricks and stings their prayers

Wearing hats of straw, almond and amber
browed boys submit to hardness and heat,
stop to notice nibbled leaves—the work
of rabbits

The boys are deep in worship.

Discussion questions for the poem *Traditional Lyric*:

1. Explain the parallel between church and working in the fields.
 2. Do you think that rural people make a religion out of working hard? Explain.
 3. Do you think that the religion of many rural people includes an 11th commandment related to hard work? Explain.
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