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Abstract: Objectives: This paper explores religious beliefs, practices, and representations of the Alexian Brothers, a religious order of Catholic nursing brothers, and the role of gender in this discourse.

Background: Nursing in the United States developed within a cultural framework of caring as part of women's roles with families and communities; yet a study of the Alexian Brothers challenges the dominance of the "female" in most gender analyses of nursing.

Method: Historical methodology is used to evaluate and interpret data within the broader framework of historiographical literature on gender, religion, and nursing. In historicizing nursing, religion, and gender, attention has been paid to representations, mainly of women, through photographs and written literature. In this article, the same sources are used for men.

Results: The story of the Alexian Brothers and the men they educated is a testament to the power of gender and religion in nursing history. These men carved out a system of caring that recognized it as a responsibility not only of women but also of men, thus complicating established truths about gender and nursing. As they asserted that their paid work was a Christian calling, they renegotiated

dominant notions of masculinity. In so doing, men nurses navigated among an array of representations, from nurse, to school administrator, to military soldier, to religious person, to professional practitioner of scientific medicine. These self-representations in the masculine spaces of the hospital and nursing school debunked stereotypes of feminine men and challenged traditional spatial boundaries.

Key words: men in nursing, nursing history, gender and religion

June 23, 2008

Molly C. Dougherty, PhD, RN, FAAN, Editor

*Nursing Research*

Dear Dr. Dougherty:

I am submitting the article, "A masculine character in a predominantly feminine profession": Religion and Gender in a Men's Hospital and School of Nursing, 1866-1969, to *Nursing Research*. I published two articles in your journal in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue and was very pleased with them. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this new manuscript.

Sincerely,

Barbra Mann Wall, PhD, RN

Associate Professor

University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

**“A masculine character in a predominantly feminine profession”:  
Religion and Gender in a Men’s Hospital and School of Nursing, 1866-1969**

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1                   **“A masculine character in a predominantly feminine profession”:**

2                   **Religion and Gender in a Men’s Hospital and School of Nursing, 1866-1969**

3

4                   In 1966, Brother Maurice Wilson, director of the Alexian Brothers School of Nursing for

5 men in Chicago, Illinois, asserted that “there is a place for a masculine character in a

6 predominantly feminine profession” (*Diaconian*, 1966, p. 59). This paper explores the history of

7 men in nursing through the examination of the Alexian Brothers, a religious order of Catholic

8 brothers. It analyzes their religious beliefs, nursing practices, and representations to the public. It

9 also considers the role of gender in this discourse (Riches and Salih, 2002; Burke, 2005;

10 Deutsch, 2007). It asks: How does men’s history in the middle twentieth century square with

11 narratives historians habitually use to frame nursing history? How does the entry of men into

12 nursing affect their perception of difference between men and women? In historicizing nursing,

13 religion, and gender, attention has been paid to representations, mainly of women, through

14 photographs and written literature. In this article, the same sources are used for men.

15 Representation is a concept that involves how people and institutions present themselves to the

16 public through paintings, symbols, stories, photographs, written communications, and practices.

17 Although such sources do not indicate actual lived experiences, they can be useful for

18 investigating the role of religion and gender in constituting social interactions (Riches and Salih,

19 2002; Solari, 2006; Craig and Liberti, 2007).

20                   Nursing in the United States developed within a cultural framework of caring as part of

21 women’s roles with families and communities (Reverby, 1987; D’Antonio, 2007). Yet a study of

22 the Alexian Brothers challenges the dominance of the “female” in most gender analyses of

23 nursing. This study adds to theoretical understandings of how men negotiate gender identities

1 when working in a female dominated profession. The Alexian Brothers' religious institutions  
2 defined nursing as Christian work. This influenced the secular men who began entering the  
3 hospital and nursing school as nurses in the late 1930s. Building on Deutsch's (2007) work, an  
4 examination of different primary sources in the Alexian Brothers Archives shows that the men  
5 represented themselves to the public in ways that often separated themselves from female nurses.  
6 By the mid-twentieth century, gender became a structuring force for the positions that secular  
7 graduates assumed, and they typically followed masculine paths.

8         Men have worked as nurses as far back as the fourth century. Bullough and Bullough  
9 (1993) noted the predominance of religious orders of men in medieval nursing, in both Western  
10 and Eastern institutions. The Alexian Brothers, for example, organized to care for victims of the  
11 Black Plague in the fourteenth century in Germany and the Low Countries (Kauffman, 1978). It  
12 was not until the seventeenth century when St. Vincent de Paul challenged this model that  
13 religious women became more prevalent. After the Reformation, secular nurses replaced  
14 religious women in Protestant countries such as England (Bullough and Bullough, 1993). In her  
15 *Notes on Nursing* (1860), Florence Nightingale particularly highlighted the role of women as  
16 nurses. As empowering as this was for women, Bullough and Bullough's (1993) work on  
17 medieval nursing shows that this natural role allocation was not always dominant.

18         Historical methodology is used to evaluate and interpret data within the broader  
19 framework of historiographical literature on gender, religion, and nursing. The paper is set  
20 against the evolving German American and Catholic communities in Chicago, as well as the  
21 context of the advancement of modern nursing. Central to the argument is the way the Alexian  
22 Brothers responded to special needs of men. Also included are tensions that arose as the brothers  
23 updated their ideals of religious service and, sometimes painfully, claimed a new identity based

1 on professional and technological expertise over the course of the twentieth century. The paper  
2 shows that religion and gender held a both real and symbolic influence on men's nursing. At the  
3 same time, it supports Riches and Salih's (2002) work by arguing that men's pursuit of nursing  
4 and their representations to the public complicate the binary classification of gender into male  
5 and female.

### 6 Settling in the New World

7 Early histories of the Alexian Brothers reveal them to be nonliterate men who organized  
8 in the early fourteenth century to bury the dead during the height of the catastrophic Black  
9 Death, or bubonic plague. In 1472, they were officially recognized as a religious order. By the  
10 seventeenth century, they were caring for a variety of social outsiders, such as criminals and the  
11 mentally ill. As religious caregivers, they cared for the poor and sick with prayer and preparation  
12 for a "good death" (Wiegers, 1955). The Alexian Brothers followed a personal calling and  
13 believed they were doing God's will. In the nineteenth century, they followed the same tradition  
14 as women's religious nursing orders, establishing hospitals and providing nursing care in many  
15 countries. The brothers' history in America began in 1866 when Brother Bonaventure Thelan  
16 established a hospital in Chicago, confirming their long tradition of caring for the poor and  
17 destitute. The challenge ahead was to maintain traditional ways while adapting to the American  
18 social and medical environment.

19 In the United States in the nineteenth century, new medical markets developed as  
20 immigration brought diverse cultures and religions (author, 2005). Between 1820 and 1840, the  
21 largest group was Irish, but Germans were the other major Catholic immigrant constituency,  
22 numbering approximately 1.5 million people by 1860. They settled mainly in the German  
23 triangle region of Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee, and this included Chicago (Dolan,



1           The Alexian Brothers Hospital was unique in that the brothers were the administrators,  
2 nurses, x-ray technologists, laboratory technicians, pharmacists, cooks, and physical therapists,  
3 and they cared only for men and boys. Thus, their nursing occurred in a masculine context, with  
4 the hospital excelling in departments such as urology, neurology, orthopedics, and physical  
5 therapy. The brothers also opened a hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, which housed a large  
6 psychiatric facility. Not only did this extend their long ministry of caring for the mentally ill, but  
7 it also provided a setting where men nurses had traditionally worked in large numbers. Until well  
8 into the twentieth century, many men nurses graduated from schools often connected with  
9 psychiatric facilities (Roberts, 1955; Gijswijt-Hofstra, et al., 2005). By the 1950s, the Alexian  
10 Brothers Hospital was particularly well known for its care of industrial injuries, and it was the  
11 site where most of Chicago's policemen and firemen received care (Davidson, 1990).

12           Wood (1994) theorizes that "care, like any human activity, is constructed through the  
13 discourses of a culture" (p. 32). "It is in and through communication that we come to understand  
14 our own nature as well as what different interests, activities, and feelings mean and for whom  
15 they are 'appropriate'" (p. 29). Questions persist, however, as to how our culture defines who the  
16 caretakers should be (Wood, 1994; McGraw, 2005). The feminist movement provided  
17 perspectives of caring that celebrated gender differences. A particularly influential book  
18 appeared in 1982 by Gilligan, whose dichotomous theory hailed women's tendencies to care.  
19 Gilligan (1982) argued that it was something women always did and should continue to do. Her  
20 view reinforced caring's traditional association with women and further buttressed age-old  
21 stereotypes. Noddings (1984) suggested that caring was feminine, but she insisted that it did not  
22 have to be gender based. Yet, as Wood (1994) notes, "the nature of each gender – what it means  
23 to be a woman or man – is currently hotly contested" (p. 30).



1 behaviors, and attitudes” (pp. 1-2); and this was never more evident than in the Alexian  
2 Brothers’ institutions in the first half of the twentieth century. These places powerfully  
3 influenced patients as well as the meaning of nursing for the men who worked in them.

4         The brothers built religion into their physical surroundings. In 1951, the *86<sup>th</sup> Annual*  
5 *Report* announced that “while the physical care of patients at Alexian Brothers Hospital is  
6 always of great importance, the Hospital is primarily a Religious Institution” (p. 7). Any visitor  
7 to a Catholic hospital in the early twentieth century would see fountains of holy water and the  
8 characteristic paintings of the bishop, the Virgin Mary, and other saints. In the Alexian Brothers  
9 Hospital, the chapel was located on the second floor, but it was readily accessible to patients  
10 from the third and fourth floors. The brothers also kept Catholic literature in parlors.

11         Religious clothing was another physical representation of religion – a symbol of  
12 commitment that members of religious orders wore. It also served as a boundary between the  
13 brothers and secular society. Yet gender and ethnic differences also influenced this practice. At a  
14 Catholic Hospital Association meeting in 1920, Catholic sister nurses and their male superiors  
15 discussed the idea of wearing washable white habits instead of the traditional black ones.  
16 Physicians preferred the washable ones as a requirement of asepsis. While many of the sisters  
17 agreed to the change, a spiritual director of a German community of women in Springfield,  
18 Illinois, did not. He saw the habit as an expression of the differences among religious  
19 congregations, and to change it would interfere with community traditions and acquiesce to  
20 secular demands (Kauffman, 1995). How the German-born Alexian Brothers felt about this is  
21 unknown. It appears, however, that the brothers wore black habits for hospital work longer than  
22 most women’s nursing communities. It was not until sometime after World War II that white  
23 religious habits appear in photographs (*75<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*, 1940; *85<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*, 1950).

1 This likely was a reaction to the postwar modernization of American hospitals, in general, as  
2 well as the growing number of seculars who entered the Alexian Brothers' nursing program after  
3 the war.

4 Another way the brothers represented religion to the public was through their nursing  
5 practices. The spiritual needs of all patients were given prime consideration. The brothers often  
6 accompanied patients to Mass in the hospital chapel. Their 1950 *Annual Report* noted that every  
7 one of the 6,000 men admitted that year received a "simple prayer card and was asked to pray  
8 every day" (p. 9). A chaplain visited each patient upon admission. From the nineteenth to the  
9 mid-twentieth century, devotions were very much a part of Catholic spirituality. The church had  
10 revived exercises such as the rosary, forty hours devotion, and devotions to the Sacred Heart and  
11 the Immaculate Conception. These devotions were a form of personal piety that especially  
12 helped preserve the faith of immigrant Catholics displaced from their homelands (Dolan, 1992).  
13 At this time, religious devotions were particularly associated with women, but the brothers also  
14 employed them in their hospital. For example, they held rosary devotions every evening in the  
15 chapel.

#### 16 Secularization and Professionalization

17 At the same time, in the early twentieth century, the brothers were part of a Catholic  
18 tradition still trying to earn respectability. Thus, their annual reports highlighted to physicians  
19 and prospective patients that hospital personnel would practice scientific medicine. These  
20 publications showed a blend of science and religion, with photographs of brothers in their  
21 religious garb working in operating rooms and pharmacies. It was their attempt to represent  
22 themselves as proud members of the scientific professions of nursing and medicine. Photographs  
23 revealed that these aspiring professionals, albeit religious ones, saw themselves as participating

1 in the expanding world of hospital medicine. They also emphasized masculine activities, since  
2 the men were shown working in challenging, technical positions. The patients admitted to the  
3 hospital received a high standard of care, with the brothers continually updating their skills. Over  
4 the years, they constructed four different buildings as they kept up with modern technology  
5 (Davidson, 1990).

6         The Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing for men students incorporated in 1898,  
7 and, like other schools, physicians initially provided lectures (Tranbarger, 2007). In 1899, a  
8 secular nurse, Mr. Hearst, from Mills Training School for men in New York was hired as  
9 superintendent, although he stayed only a year. In 1925, the State of Illinois accredited the school  
10 (School of Nursing Monthly Meetings, 1925). The year 1926 witnessed the first class of brothers  
11 to take qualifying exams to become registered nurses. Whereas their students could obtain  
12 psychiatric experience at their St. Louis hospital, the brothers offered a general curriculum in  
13 Chicago. As nursing standards increased and science and technology expanded over the course  
14 of the twentieth century, the School of Nursing kept pace. This included requiring more intensive  
15 coursework, higher admissions standards, and licensure examinations (Brogan and Blackledge,  
16 1926; 74<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report*, 1939).

17         Certain brothers, however, opposed the school and the growing secularization that came  
18 from state regulation. They also objected to the potential corrupting influence from secular  
19 students. In the early twentieth century, physicians periodically brought up the possibility of  
20 enrolling secular students into the school in order to meet the need for more nurses. As noted  
21 above, Mr. Hearst's appointment in 1899 was short-lived. As one historian noted, seculars did  
22 not fit into the closed unit that the brothers had created – one in which strict monastic rules  
23 insulated against any “inbreeding” from seculars (Davidson, 1990, p. 64). In 1927, physicians

1 convinced the brothers to admit four seculars, but thereafter the brothers persisted in keeping the  
2 school open only to brothers. During this time, tensions escalated between Old and New World  
3 ideas. The German motherhouse upheld respect for authority, tradition, and loyalty to the  
4 congregation, and many of the brothers in Chicago were grounded in this vision. On the other  
5 hand, reformers in the American congregation focused on responding to the needs of the  
6 American situation, and this included respect for the American values of individualism,  
7 democracy, and education (Kauffman, 1978; Davidson, 1990).

8           While the American brothers remained legally tied to the centralized authority structures  
9 in Germany until the 1940s, they Americanized socially and professionally over the course of the  
10 twentieth century. But conflicts between the old and new persisted all along the way. The  
11 traditionalists resisted what they viewed as the pernicious trends of New World secularism and  
12 modernism, and they disapproved of nonreligious, academic goals. As an example, in 1938 the  
13 traditionalists required that novices do their novitiate in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, to insulate  
14 them from secular influences. That made them unavailable as student nurses in Chicago. These  
15 restrictions, along with the limitation of innovative changes in the curriculum, persisted  
16 throughout the 1930s. As hospital admissions decreased during the Depression, the small number  
17 of nursing brothers and students could keep up with hospital requirements. But as the patient  
18 load increased toward the end of the decade, the hospital faced a serious nursing shortage. It was  
19 at this time that a choice had to be made between tradition and daily staffing needs (Davidson,  
20 1990).

21           The Alexian leaders held an important meeting on January 12, 1939, for the express  
22 purpose of “discussing the advisability of accepting secular nurses into the school of nursing.”  
23 After much discussion, the brothers decided to admit them the following September. They also

1 began an affiliation with De Paul University for students to take biological and physical science  
2 courses, with the option of applying the credits toward a baccalaureate degree (*74<sup>th</sup> Annual*  
3 *Report*, 1939. n.p.). In the fall of 1939, they registered 27 seculars. Still emphasizing the  
4 importance of religion, the brothers recorded each student's religious affiliation, and, by far, the  
5 largest numbers were Catholic (Brogan and Blackledge, September 8, 1939).

6         The nursing shortage during World War II was potentially devastating to a hospital in  
7 which men were the only nurses. The draft loomed large in 1941, and the brothers repeatedly  
8 appealed to the Draft Board for deferments for their students. Fearing a huge loss of students and  
9 nurses, the brothers were able to obtain the services of conscientious objectors. Under the  
10 Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, thousands of men were able to get IV-E  
11 classification and were drafted into "work of national importance." Men came from Mennonite,  
12 Quaker, Church of the Brethren, and Catholic organizations. Eventually, as part of the Civilian  
13 Public Service, the Selective Service offered these pacifist conscriptees to the American Hospital  
14 Association. It was from this organization that the brothers requested a unit. They provided an  
15 accelerated course in practical nursing, and over 100 men worked in the hospital from 1941 until  
16 the end of the war. Sixty-three did actual nursing, giving baths and backrubs, taking vital signs,  
17 making beds, charting patient's conditions, and assisting with admissions and discharges. Eleven  
18 became students in the 3-year nursing program. Seven dropped out of the school or were  
19 transferred. Whether or not they viewed this hands-on care with patients' bodies as counter to the  
20 gendered expectations for men is unknown. Of the ones who remained, half planned to go to  
21 medical school, a more traditional profession for men. Still, many of the others remained in  
22 nursing until their retirement (Lion and Bell, 1945).



1 that support their gender identities” (p. 311). For this reinterpretation to work, however,  
2 institutional support is required so that the person can be recognized as valid by others. The  
3 Alexian Brothers Hospital and School of Nursing provided this support. It allowed students to  
4 renegotiate notions of masculinity to include nursing as manly work that followed a Christian  
5 calling.

6 After seculars entered the school, advertisements began focusing on masculine aspects of  
7 nursing. To be sure, yearbooks and annual reports still focused on the blend of science and  
8 religion. But in the 1940s, due to the nursing shortage, the brothers needed to attract more  
9 seculars into their school. Just as they built religion into their physical surroundings, the brothers  
10 masculinized the spaces of the nursing school. They added pool tables, a large swimming pool,  
11 and a boxing ring that held student tournaments (*85<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*, 1950). The publications  
12 were revealing in other ways. A section in the school yearbook entitled “Memorable Events”  
13 described energetic men engaging in all manner of activities such as coed dances and parties,  
14 class picnics, and initiation rites. For example, one graduate recalled September 3, 1952: “faces  
15 smeared with shoe polish, lipstick and a generous supply of tape...clothes on  
16 backwards...greased volley ball...mass calisthenics....” (Memorable Events, 1952, p. 26). The  
17 message conveyed was clear: in this all-male school, active men participated in sports and other  
18 masculine activities. This countered any stereotype of nursing schools as feminine spaces.

19 In 1942, the first group of secular students graduated. Since this was during World War  
20 II, most planned to enter the military. The Valedictory Address serves as an example of how men  
21 nurses used gender distinctions to gain acceptance for their work. An analysis of the text reveals  
22 that the graduate was arguing for men to be accepted as nurses into the Army and Navy Nurse  
23 Corps. At that time, gender shaped who could serve as nurses in the armed forces, with nursing

1 as women's work and combat as men's. Men who were registered nurses could enlist or be  
2 drafted, but they could not be assigned as nurses. The country's involvement in World War II,  
3 however, provided an opportunity for men nurses to press their claims to professional equality  
4 with women in the military.

5 Noting the uncertainty of the future, the valedictorian elaborated on how professional  
6 men nurses should secure medical placements in their wartime military service. "In view of the  
7 need for competent nurses by the government," he stated, "must I disregard all that I have  
8 learned in training, in order to take up a gun? As a registered man nurse, would I be of no value  
9 as such to my country?" Revealing the insecurities some men nurses had over the perceived  
10 status of female nurses compared to them, the graduate distinguished men nurses as being not  
11 only different from but also better than women in some areas. Although he did not elaborate  
12 specifics, he justified men's acceptance as nurses in the military by arguing that their  
13 qualifications differed from women. "Whether or not the 'ladies of the cloth' will admit it," he  
14 stated, "the fact still remains that the man nurse is more competent than they in many situations  
15 which arise in medical services – that he can step in where the angels fear to tread....Certain  
16 aspects of contemporary hospital service have only too obviously proven it." Religion also  
17 affected the meaning this graduate gave to his work, and he closed his address by stating that,  
18 "nursing, when properly motivated, is one of the finest ways to show that Christ-like love for our  
19 fellow men" (Kaveny, 1942, n.p.). Gender stereotypes did adversely affect men in the Army  
20 Nurse Corps. Federal law and a preference for female nurses prevented men from receiving  
21 reserve commissions until 1955, and they did not obtain full military commissions until 1966  
22 during the Vietnam War (Sarnecky, 1999).

1 Another valedictory address in 1955 also shows how language and communication are  
2 shaped by gender. In celebrating the role of men in nursing, the graduate elaborated on the  
3 characteristics of a “good nurse”: generosity of spirit, patience, cheerfulness, self sacrifice, and  
4 effacement, more feminine qualities. But he also listed the masculine characteristics of executive  
5 ability, courage, and willingness to submit to strict discipline and hard work (Ferguson, 1955, p.  
6 21). Clearly for these men, their training school experiences with the Alexian Brothers increased  
7 their consciousness of a special religious and professional identity for themselves as nurses. As  
8 they underscored their skills, they also framed their work as a way of serving God. In addition,  
9 they embraced qualities usually portrayed as feminine, but they gave the clear message that men  
10 as well as women could personify them. However, in their attempt to broaden social ideas about  
11 masculinity, they identified other qualities in themselves, those more commonly associated with  
12 men – such as bravery, executive skills, and discipline.

13 After the brothers built a new nursing school building in 1955, they were able to admit  
14 larger classes and faculties; and the school obtained full National League for Nursing  
15 accreditation. In 1962, 13 full-time faculty members and eight lecturers educated a graduating  
16 class of 42, the largest in the school’s history and one of the largest classes in any men’s nursing  
17 school in the country (Davidson, 1990). Many had been attracted by the school’s publications  
18 that stressed that men nurses were more likely to advance to specialized fields such as anesthesia,  
19 education, and supervisory work.

20 By the mid-1960s, men were entering the Alexian nursing program with certain career  
21 paths in mind. Williams (1989, 1993) argues that men nurses today often are shunted to specific  
22 paths by their instructors, and students’ experiences in the Alexian Brothers school serves as an  
23 historical parallel. Several men planned to use nursing as a stepping stone to the medical

1 profession, a view that was more representative of a masculine perspective of acquiring  
2 education and power. Gender was a structuring force for other positions the secular graduates  
3 assumed. A 1966 survey showed that most of the graduates were working in prestigious and high  
4 paying positions: 42% in anesthesia and 24% in administration. Others were doing typical  
5 “men’s work,” with 22% serving in the military and 12% working in industrial and psychiatric  
6 nursing. Floor nursing, which required more intimate hands-on work, had only 18%. Here, the  
7 men worked as head nurses and staff nurses. And 6% were clinical instructors (Welker, 1966).

8         After five years of discussions with experts in the field, the Alexian Brothers decided to  
9 close the school in 1969. At that time, they were offering students specialized psychiatric  
10 nursing, maternity, and pediatrics courses (*Diaconian*, 1948, 1954, 1969). The last yearbook  
11 noted that “four-year university and college programs are better equipped to produce the highly-  
12 specialized nurse that is needed today, and this is especially true of the man in nursing”  
13 (*Diaconian*, 1969, p. 59). This last phrase is telling. In the eyes of the Alexian instructors, higher  
14 education credentials separated men nurses from women, allowing the men to maintain their  
15 masculine identities as they worked in a female dominated job. Thus, in a variety of publications,  
16 the Alexian Brothers and their students sometimes debunked gender stereotypes, while at other  
17 times they maintained gender differences by adhering to the idea that men held certain  
18 advantages over women nurses.

19         At the school’s closing, Brother Maurice Wilson, the director of the program, noted that  
20 the goal of the school had not been “to make the nursing profession masculine.” Rather,  
21 throughout its 71 years of existence, it had aimed to gain society’s acceptance of men in nursing.  
22 “When society questioned the reason why a man went into nursing,” he continued, “when the  
23 armed forces refused to recognize this man, and even when the professional organization was

1 quiet in its acceptance of men into its ranks, the Alexian Brothers were quietly but persistently  
2 promoting and encouraging men to move into this hospital field” (*Diaconian*, 1969, p. 59). To  
3 this end, the brothers provided opportunities for 779 men to graduate in nursing. Of this number,  
4 621 were seculars. In the final yearbook, the men represented their masculine identities to the  
5 public in photos of graduates serving in the military; working in highly technical areas of acute  
6 care and anesthesia; becoming physicians; and posing with their families (*Diaconian*, 1969).

### 7 Conclusion

8 In closing, the story of the Alexian Brothers and the men they educated is a testament to  
9 the power of gender and religion in nursing history. These men carved out a system of caring that  
10 recognized it as a responsibility not only of women but also of men, thus complicating  
11 established truths about gender and nursing. As they asserted that their paid work was a Christian  
12 calling, they “renegotiated dominant notions of masculinity” (Solari, 2006, p. 304). In so doing,  
13 men nurses navigated among an array of representations, from nurse, to school administrator, to  
14 military soldier, to religious person, to professional practitioner of scientific medicine. It was the  
15 Alexian Brothers’ religious institutions that set the conditions for the way gender and religious  
16 identities were woven together. In some ways, however, the fears of the traditionalists came true  
17 after seculars entered the nursing program. As seculars outnumbered religious in the school,  
18 publications displayed images that had as much to do with masculine as religious roles. These  
19 self-representations in the masculine spaces of the hospital and nursing school debunked  
20 stereotypes of feminine men and challenged traditional spatial boundaries.

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