Objective: The purpose of the study is to analyze the nurse’s image during the commencement mass for the first graduating class of the Ribeirão Preto School of Nursing at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1957. Methods: The images were analyzed in light of the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu and the literature on rites, fashion, body language, the history of Brazil and the history of nursing. Results: Two images that meet the criteria for inclusion were found in the institution’s historical collection. The graduation mass was celebrated on December 21, 1957 at 8:30 a.m. and was entitled the Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Ribeirão Preto Holy House of Mercy. Conclusion: The signs instituted in the graduation mass include the uniform, the cap and the space between the graduates and the public, which was marked with clear fabric and denotes an area of social distinction. In addition, the corporal héxis reveals seriousness and purity, and helps to establish the new image of the graduate nurse in Ribeirão Preto. This study serves to broaden the discussion on construction of the nurse’s image, professional identity and the Catholic influence in nursing education.

Keywords
History of nursing, ceremonial behavior, nursing, schools, nursing, symbolism.