Neil G. McCluskey: A Public Voice for Catholic Education

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In 1971, at the sixty-fifth anniversary banquet for the journal Religious Education, Neil G. McCluskey was recognized as a pioneering Catholic educator. At that point, McCluskey was well known for his outgoing and friendly manner and quick wit and for making significant contributions for over two decades to discussions about Catholic education and the nature and purpose of religious and moral education in the United States. His scholarly work in religious education would continue for another two decades.

How many people know Neil G. McCluskey’s work today? Some religious educators are aware of McCluskey’s classic work, Catholic Viewpoint on Education. The book is one of the best expressions of McCluskey’s superb ability to shed light on educational trends and issues by examining their social context and guiding readers in envisioning how these trends and issues could continue to develop as we look toward the future. Yet, many people today are unaware of McCluskey’s contributions to religious education.

This chapter explores McCluskey’s life and contributions to religious education. Its overall purpose is to enable readers to become more familiar with a person whose teaching, administrative work, writing, and public speaking have helped to shape the ways religious faith, education, and public life intersect in U.S. culture.

A Brief Biography

Neil Gerard McCluskey was born December 15, 1920, in Seattle, Washington. He was the fourth of Patrick John and Mary Genevieve
McCluskey’s six children. McCluskey entered the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in 1938. In 1944 he received his A.B. degree from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, with a double major in English and psychology. An M.A. in philosophy from Gonzaga followed in 1945. In 1952 McCluskey received an S.T.L. (Licentiate in Sacred Theology) from Alma College, now the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Once he completed his degree at Alma College, McCluskey went to live, travel, and study in Europe. In Europe McCluskey was mentored by Père François Charmot while he studied ascetical psychology at the Maison Colombière, Paray-le-Monial, France, in 1952-53. He then studied educational psychology under the tutelage of Jean Piaget in 1953-54 at the Université de Genève.

In September 1955, McCluskey moved to New York City to pursue new opportunities for personal and professional development. First, he became an associate editor of America, a position he held until August of 1960. America is a national Catholic weekly journal of opinion published by the Jesuits. McCluskey’s articles and commentaries in America focused on educational concerns, but he also wrote about other timely religious and social issues. Second, McCluskey studied at Columbia Graduate School of Philosophy and Teachers College, earning a Ph.D. in social history in 1957. His dissertation was a comparative study of the educational philosophies of Horace Mann, William Torrey Harris, and John Dewey, with a focus on moral education in United States public schools. During his first of two extended periods in New York, McCluskey became a sought-after lecturer and presenter, addressing groups both within and beyond Catholic communities. He continued to be active on the lecture circuit for the next twenty-five years.

McCluskey began to address critical issues about Catholic education and religious education in U.S. culture as early as 1950 (McCluskey 1950a and 1950b). His reflections deepened and matured through his travels and studies here and abroad. The early fruits of these reflections were presented in two books published in the late 1950s. First, in Public Schools and Moral Education (1958), McCluskey addressed the lack of consensus in the United States about governmental support for religious and moral instruction (McCluskey 1958). The book was, in essence, a revised and somewhat expanded version of McCluskey’s dissertation research. Second, McCluskey offered a broad
analysis of education in the United States with a specific focus on Catholic education in *Catholic Viewpoint on Education* (1959).

In September 1960, McCluskey returned to Gonzaga University as an associate professor of education. In 1964 McCluskey was appointed Dean of the School of Education and then became Academic Vice President of Gonzaga. While serving in these positions, McCluskey played a central role in the administrative and programmatic reorganization of the university. During his time at Gonzaga McCluskey also helped to develop the Honors Program and originated the Gonzaga in Florence (GIF) study abroad program. At the present time, both the Gonzaga Honors Program and GIF continue to thrive and remain central to the educational mission of the university. While at Gonzaga, McCluskey also published *Catholic Education in America*, “a sampling of the important documents that explain Catholic education over the last 175 years,” with a general introduction and introductions to each document by McCluskey (McCluskey 1964, 2).

In the fall of 1966, McCluskey became Visiting Professor of Education at Notre Dame University. The next year he was appointed Professor of Education and Dean-Director of the Notre Dame Institute for Studies in Education. The year after that, McCluskey founded the *Notre Dame Journal of Education*, a professional quarterly journal. Despite its positive reception, the journal ceased publication in 1976 because of lack of funding. While at Notre Dame McCluskey began to devote more time to addressing issues of Catholic higher education and adult religious education. He also became more actively involved in the Religious Education Association (REA) and the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU).

McCluskey published *Catholic Education Faces its Future* in 1968. He began the book with the claim: “The explosive forces unloosed by the Second Vatican Council are forcing a complete reappraisal of Catholic education in the United States at all levels” (McCluskey 1968, 17). History has shown, of course, that this was indeed the case. Yet, Vatican II did not force McCluskey to reappraise completely his own approach to religious and educational issues. Rather, the stances McCluskey took in his early work (for example, his focus on ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, his calls for freedom of religion and his emphasis on the social dimensions of Christian faith) foreshadowed many of the developments of Vatican II. Hence, even
though he was writing in the light of the updated teachings of the Second Vatican Council, McCluskey’s focus in much of Catholic Education was on further developing the approach to educational issues that he had first formulated in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

While at Notre Dame, McCluskey collected and edited scholarly essays to address questions about Catholic higher education. He contributed an essay on university governance to the collection and published it in 1970 as The Catholic University: A Modern Appraisal.

McCluskey returned to New York City in 1971 to become a professor and Dean of the Division of Professional Programs at Lehman College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY). While at Lehman College McCluskey oversaw an extensive administrative reorganization of the division he led and developed new programs in teacher education, most notably PACE (Program for Alternative Careers in Education). At this point in his career McCluskey focused his teaching, research, writing, and lecturing on addressing issues of adult education.

In 1975, McCluskey became the Professor of Gerontological Studies and Director of the Center for Gerontological Studies, CUNY. While McCluskey continued his research and lecturing in the fields of education and religious education into the 1980s, this new position provided opportunities for him to pursue developing interests in life-transition planning and life-quality for the aging (McCluskey 1979 and 1981, Borgatta and McCluskey 1980, and McCluskey and Borgatta 1981).

McCluskey resigned from the Society of Jesus in 1975 and in 1978 married Elaine Lituchy Jacobs.

In the fall of 1981, McCluskey was appointed Executive Director of BHRAGS, Inc. BHRAGS had been formed by combining Brooklyn’s Haitian, Ralph, and Good Shepherd social service centers. BHRAGS focused on providing job training for people of all ages and social services for young people and older adults. Under McCluskey’s leadership BHRAGS’s total number of programs went from eight to twenty. Then, in 1986 McCluskey became the director of Mainstream, an Institute for Mature Adults at Westchester Community College, and he rebuilt the institute’s programs. To ease his way into retirement in the late 1980s, McCluskey became a senior consultant with Retirement Advisors and offered seminars on mid-career/life assessment and retirement education. These seminars had a specific focus on issues of
faith and spirituality and were often offered for Christian and Jewish groups. In 1990 he started the Westchester Literary Agency in Hartsdale, New York. The Westchester Literary Agency continued to assist writers and aspiring writers until 2004.

After Neil and Elaine McCluskey retired, they moved to Florida. They were active in their local community and maintained contact with a large network of extended family and friends. In late 2007, Neil McCluskey underwent intestinal surgery and died of complications on May 27, 2008.

Countering Anti-Catholicism in the United States

One of McCluskey’s most significant contributions as a Catholic educator was to help many people in the United States to gain a better understanding of Catholic Christianity. When McCluskey was growing up there was a great deal of anti-Catholicism in the United States. Fear and distrust of Catholics was still quite common in the 1950s and into the 1960s. For example, Paul Blanshard’s anti-Catholic tract *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1958) was widely read and praised by many in the United States throughout this period of time. McCluskey was part of a loose coalition of Catholic intellectuals, many of whom were Jesuits, who sought actively to counteract the effects of anti-Catholicism and to make Catholic perspectives on social and religious issues understandable within the broad expanse of United States society. John Courtney Murray was one of the best known members of this coalition. McCluskey dedicated both *Catholic Viewpoint* and *Catholic Education* to Murray. While Murray focused mostly on political and social issues, McCluskey concentrated on addressing anti-Catholicism (what he tended to call “the shadow of bigotry”) in the educational forums of the United States.

Reaching out Beyond the Catholic Community

McCluskey anchored his efforts to counter anti-Catholicism in outreach beyond the United States Catholic community. For example, in April of 1957 McCluskey was part of an inter-religious forum at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the American Jewish Committee in New York. At a time when many Catholics would literally not set foot
in a Protestant church let alone a Jewish synagogue, he called on Catholics and Jews to recognize parallels in their histories in the United States: both are minorities, both are often treated with suspicion in the broader culture, and both embrace firmly established faith traditions that they are trying to bring into dialogue with the democratic values and freedoms prominent in the United States. Generally, McCluskey demonstrated a profound respect for Judaism.

Similarly, in February of 1960 McCluskey delivered a paper at the annual convention of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on why public support should be given to parochial schools (McCluskey 1963). The beginning part of his paper focused on explaining why many Catholics preferred Catholic schools to public schools. In the last two-thirds of the presentation, McCluskey stressed what Catholics and non-Catholics have in common and he argued for public support for private schools primarily as a matter of respect for parents’ freedom to choose the education that they think is best for their children.

Throughout his career McCluskey was a member of the REA, an organization whose membership is predominantly Protestant, though the number of Catholic members has grown in recent years. From 1967-89, McCluskey was a member of the REA Board of Directors, serving a number of years on the Editorial Committee for the REA journal *Religious Education* during this time. Additionally, through the REA McCluskey became involved with the National Council on Religion and Public Education (NCRPE), serving as president of the council from 1973-76. Throughout his work with the REA and NCRPE, McCluskey was sensitive to anti-Catholic sentiments among his religious education colleagues and worked to present an understandable and credible Catholic perspective on educational and social issues.

**Presenting a Catholic Viewpoint on Education**

As part of his efforts to counter anti-Catholicism, a great deal of McCluskey’s scholarly writing was focused on presenting a Catholic viewpoint on educational issues using language that would be intelligible across the broad expanse of social and political contexts found in the United States. For instance, both of McCluskey’s major
books, *A Catholic Viewpoint on Education* and *Catholic Education Faces its Future*, were written to address the educational concerns voiced by professional educators and the general population from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and secular humanistic perspectives. Moreover, McCluskey’s writings enjoyed a wide circulation because they were generally seen as clearly written, accessible, and scholarly. One commentator even describes McCluskey’s introduction to *Catholic Education in America* as a “model essay” on U.S. Catholic education (Cross 1974, 127).

**Religious Freedom and the Contribution of Catholicism to the Common Good**

An analysis of McCluskey’s work reveals that he used three primary arguments to help people understand and become more accepting of Catholicism. First, McCluskey argued that Catholics are linked to and could work cooperatively with other religious groups in the United States because of shared social histories. For instance, in his 1957 presentation to the American Jewish Committee McCluskey stressed, as noted above, the shared concerns of Jews and Catholics in the United States. Similarly, in *Catholic Viewpoint on Education*, McCluskey demonstrated how the evolution of U.S. Catholic education could be seen as part of the general development of education in the United States. He emphasized that Catholics share a concern for moral and religious education with many of their non-Catholic neighbors, even though they will always hold distinct religious convictions (McCluskey 1959, 15-34).

Second, McCluskey contended strongly throughout his career that popular stereotypes of Catholics as close-minded and authoritarian were unfounded, and he countered these characterizations by demonstrating that Catholics embraced, even championed, a commitment to religious freedom. More fully, while at Alma College, McCluskey enrolled in a seminar devoted to exploring recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions concerning state support for private schools. In the discussions of these cases, critics of state support for private, religiously-affiliated schools accused these schools, and Catholic schools in particular, of supporting a sectarian and separatist social outlook that was antithetical to the democratic values and freedoms of
the United States. They argued that if the state supported these schools it would be undermining, rather than carrying out, its responsibility to ensure that civic education is provided for the nation’s children. McCluskey was affected deeply by these discussions and made a commitment to respond to critics of private support for religious schools.

In addressing the charge that Catholicism and Catholic schools are antithetical to religious freedom, McCluskey began by going back to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. It states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” The phrase “make no law respecting an establishment of religion” is generally known as “the no establishment of religion clause.” Critics of public funding for religious schools charged that the authorization of such funding would violate the no establishment of religion clause. McCluskey countered this claim by focusing on the phrase “make no law . . . prohibiting the free exercise thereof [religion].” This phrase is commonly known as the “freedom of religion clause.” In numerous public addresses and scholarly publications, McCluskey argued that to deny funding to religious schools would violate established laws and legal precedents, including the freedom of religion clause of the United States Constitution. For instance, in his 1960 address to the Association of School Administrators (ASA) McCluskey claimed that failure to support parochial schools should be seen as a hostile act against religious persons and families and as such is a violation of “freedom of choice in education” and ultimately of the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment (McCluskey 1963, 3; 1959, 139-54).

In some of his work, McCluskey took his religious freedom argument one step further. He suggested (and we need to remember that he wrote at a time when Communism was the most feared enemy of the Unites States) that to eliminate all private schools and maintain only a public school system would be to foster a monolithic, state-controlled, narrowly ideological educational system similar to that found in what was then the Soviet Union. Thus, McCluskey suggested that Catholic schools championed religious freedom at a time when advocates of public education were calling for a Communist-like system of state dominance and control of all learning (McCluskey
1959, 41 and 1963, 1). Generally, in arguing for state support for religious schools as a matter of religious freedom, McCluskey helped to counter prejudices against U.S. Catholics by showing how Catholics could use the common language provided by the U.S. legal system to present their educational views, and in doing so, show Catholics as supportive of the democratic values and freedoms of our nation.

Third, in tandem with his argument for state support for religious schools as a matter of religious freedom, McCluskey also often claimed that Catholic schools should be supported because of the contribution they make to society. For example, in his 1960 address to the ASA, McCluskey cited Title I of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which he summarized as holding “that the security of the nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and the technical skills of its young men and women.” He argued that Catholic schools had made and continued to make a significant contribution to the cultivation of the talents of the nation’s youth and consequently deserved to be supported by the state (McCluskey 1963, 5).

Today, there is still a degree of anti-Catholicism in the United States (Massa 2003). However, because of the efforts of McCluskey and other Catholic leaders in the last half of the twentieth century, Catholics in the United States are usually accepted and treated as equals today by those from other faith and philosophical traditions. Moreover, McCluskey helped Catholics to be accepted and welcomed within a variety of forums in the United States, enabling them to contribute to discussions of significant educational and other social issues affecting the nation.

Educating for Catholic Identity in the United States

McCluskey contributed significantly to the education of United States Catholics in the last half of the twentieth century. In retrospect, the Catholic Church in the United States during McCluskey’s childhood and early life was often deeply divided along ethnic lines. It was common at this time, for instance, to find an Irish Catholic parish and school, an Italian Catholic parish and school, a German Catholic parish and school and maybe as many as half a dozen other ethnic parishes and schools in a mid-sized or large U.S. city. The various Catholic ethnic groups often tended to avoid contact with one another.
just as they avoided their Protestant and Jewish neighbors. Some of those who lived within these ethnic communities had fairly narrow views of the world. In his lecturing, administrative work, and writing McCluskey sought to move U.S. Catholics beyond their divisions and to develop a broader, more expansive view of themselves and the world. McCluskey even suggested that in some cases Catholics who had never moved beyond the boundaries of particular Catholic communities should not receive all of their schooling under Catholic auspices so that they could have opportunities to gain a broader sense of U.S. culture (Lee 1969, 7-8).

McCluskey’s interest in fostering a viable sense of Catholic identity in the United States was linked or related directly to his efforts to: draw attention to the distinctiveness of a Catholic viewpoint on education, explore the aims of education, educate Catholics to relate to non-Catholics and the broader culture, instill an understanding of the importance of critical reflection in education, and attend to immediate educational concerns while maintaining a comprehensive and holistic guiding vision of education.

A Catholic Viewpoint on Education

In articulating what he called a Catholic viewpoint or outlook on education, McCluskey noted that while public education in the United States tends to focus on the role of the state to provide educational opportunities, a Catholic viewpoint focuses on the interrelated functions of family, civil society (which includes but is not limited to the state), and the Church: “Each has distinct rights, yet all are properly ordered to ensure balance and harmony within the total educational process” (McCluskey 1959, 80). McCluskey suggested that a diminished sense of the role of the family in educating children has led at times to a failure to respect the rights of parents to send their children to private schools when the available public schools are offensive to the faith and moral standards of their family. He also called for Catholics to assert their right to educate their children in ways that are consistent with their faith and moral values.

To the United States Catholics who heard McCluskey’s presentations or read his books or articles from the 1950s through the 1980s, McCluskey’s articulation of a Catholic viewpoint on education
offered both a reminder and a challenge. On the one hand, McCluskey’s work reminded Catholics that even if they were separated into German, Italian, and other ethnic communities, they were united by their Catholicism, including common Catholic beliefs, values, and similar if not shared perspectives on family life and education. On the other hand, McCluskey challenged Catholics to work together to assert their rights in the broader society. As already noted, he even called Catholics to champion the core American value of religious freedom when this value was neglected by those calling for the creation of a monolithic public educational system.

**Exploring the Aims of Education**

In addition to discussing a Catholic viewpoint or outlook on education, McCluskey developed a philosophy of education in a number of addresses and written works. From a broad philosophical perspective, McCluskey held that a viable educational process needs to have a dual or twofold aim. It must attend to both the natural and supernatural dimensions of the human person. More fully, education, according to McCluskey, should be about our life here and now, and about our supernatural destiny as we come face to face with God after death. In *Catholic Education* McCluskey further developed his ideas about the dual purpose of education using the metaphor of time and eternity. He asserted that education needs to be focused on the now, the present time, and on preparing people to live in the present. Yet, he argued that any education that focused only on the now is incomplete. Education must also focus on eternity, on what we can contribute to what comes after us in this life and what awaits us after death (McCluskey 1959, 75-80 and 1968, 1-45).

McCluskey suggested that the various Catholic communities in the Unites States could retain and celebrate their ethnic roots as they focused on the now or present moment. He also contended that Catholics in the United States can and should affirm a sense of transcendent values and the eternal destiny of the human person as a foundation for working cooperatively amongst themselves and with others in the broader society. Additionally, the value of Catholic schools, McCluskey contended, is that they can provide an “atmosphere and values” that make it possible to attend to both the
now and the eternal, each in “their proper place.” Stated differently, Catholic schools can provide an environment in which educators can attend to the “total spectrum” of human “experience” and focus on the development of “the whole person” (McCluskey 1968, 35). Moreover, McCluskey suggested that as a united group, Catholics in the United States could help to correct an impoverishing neglect of the significance of the supernatural or eternal in United States public education.

Relating to Non-Catholics and the Broader Culture

In addressing the issue of how Catholics should relate to non-Catholics, McCluskey counseled Catholics to develop a reflective and discerning outlook, or what can be called prudential discernment. As envisioned by McCluskey, such an outlook on life should be based upon a holistic understanding of the human person and, as such, it should include respect for both the dignity of persons and legitimate social values. For instance, in one of the first articles he wrote for America, McCluskey explored the Jehovah’s Witness faith. McCluskey noted that Catholics and Jehovah’s Witnesses could relate to one another insofar as both groups have been persecuted minorities within the United States. Yet, McCluskey was critical of the unwillingness of Jehovah’s Witnesses to enter into genuine dialogue with others because such unwillingness reveals a failure to respect the dignity of persons as reflective of the image and likeness of God. He encouraged Catholics to question secretive, and hence anti-social, Jehovah’s Witness practices (McCluskey 1955). In contrast, when considering how Catholics should relate to Protestants and Jews, McCluskey suggested that whenever there is a genuine respect for persons as made in God’s image, openness to dialogue, and a willingness to work together to address issues of common concern, Catholics should be willing to work with other groups to secure their own legitimate rights and to contribute to the common good of society (McCluskey 1959, 187-92).

McCluskey also called upon Catholics to exercise prudential discernment in the way they approached educational and other social issues. For instance, McCluskey encouraged U.S. Catholics to affirm individual rights as a way of respecting the unique God-given dignity of persons. Yet, he also asked Catholics to recognize limits to these rights. For instance, he noted that parents’ rights to educational choice
in providing for their children are not absolute, but subject to limits by a concern for the common welfare. He claimed that the state could legitimately interfere with parents’ choices if parents opt for an educational curriculum that seeks to undermine the democratic freedoms and values of our nation (1959, 81).

The Importance of Critical Reflection

In his lecturing and writing McCluskey always affirmed the achievements of Catholics and Catholic education in the United States. At the same time, he always stressed the challenges faced by Catholics and Catholic educators and the need for critical reflection in addressing these challenges. A classic example of the mix of affirmation, challenge and call to critical reflection in McCluskey’s approach to education is found in his April 1960 address in Chicago to the Conference of Diocesan School Superintendents of the National Catholic Educational Association. McCluskey began his presentation by comparing United States Catholic schools to dinosaurs. He stated:

Since 1940, American Catholic school enrollment has increased 147 percent, so that today our elementary and secondary schools enroll slightly more than five million pupils. This is truly a remarkable achievement. There is little time, however, for the kind of preening and mutual admiration that induces euphoria. . . . There is always a temptation to look upon bigness as a guarantee of security and survival. It is not. Back in the good old days of the Mesozoic Era, nothing more grand and fearful strode the earth than the mighty brontosaurus and tyrannosaurus and stegosaurs. Yet, these fierce monsters with their tiny brains and huge bodies, along with the rest of the dinosaur family, suddenly disappeared. Paleontologists generally agreed that one reason these unwieldy giants became extinct is that they were unable to adapt to new conditions imposed by climatic upheavals. There may not be an ice age ahead for us, but if Catholic education is to continue to flourish in the decades ahead, those responsible for leadership must be keenly aware of present challenges and make required adaptations. (McCluskey 1965, 11-12)
Generally, the importance of critical reflection is an underlying theme in much of McCluskey's work. McCluskey argued that Catholic educators need to be critically reflective about the challenges they face in guiding Catholic schools and educational programs. He also encouraged Catholics educators to instill a sense of the value of critical reflection in those they taught.

A Comprehensive Educational Vision

From the 1950s to the end of his career McCluskey was an educator whose hand was on the pulse of Catholicism in the United States. This led McCluskey to address immediate educational needs as they developed in the U.S. Catholic Church and to consider educational issues at every stage of the life-cycle. In the 1950s when Catholics were moving into the United States mainstream, many Catholics were concerned about the education of their children. McCluskey responded by addressing issues about public and Catholic schooling. When Catholic concerns about issues of higher education became prominent in the 1960s, McCluskey again responded and addressed these issues. By the mid-1970s, many Catholics felt settled and “at home” in the United States; their concerns began to shift toward issues of mid-life transition and life in older adulthood. Once again McCluskey, perceiving this shift, began designing adult and older-adult educational programs to meet the needs being voiced within Catholic communities around the country. (McCluskey’s educational outreach at this point in his life, however, was not limited to Catholic communities. In providing life-transition and life-quality seminars and educational programming that incorporated a focus on spirituality, McCluskey was also in contact with Jewish and Protestant communities and groups.)

As he attended to immediate educational needs, McCluskey always viewed educational issues within the light of a broad, comprehensive, and holistic vision of education. For example, the subtitle of Catholic Education is The Background, Present Position, and Future Trends of Catholic Education. The book discusses the educational issues faced by the Catholic Church in the United States in the post-Vatican II era. In examining these issues McCluskey explores their background,
that is, their social and historical context as seen from a distinctively Catholic viewpoint. He also raises broad philosophical and theological concerns about human nature, sin, and the supernatural/eternal or transcendent dimension of human life. Overall, McCluskey’s analysis of Catholic education moves from a consideration of the immediate post-Vatican II context to a reflection upon the emerging challenges and opportunities facing Catholic education as seen in the light of a comprehensive and holistic guiding vision of education.

For United States Catholics in the last half of the twentieth century, how McCluskey discussed educational issues was as instructive as the analysis he offered. In essence, he suggested that Catholics needed to be concerned about the immediate issues affecting their lives and their relations with others. Yet, he counseled Catholics not to be limited in their approach to issues by narrow understandings of personal and group interests. Rather, he conveyed that a broad sense of Catholic identity and an inclusive concern for the eternal destiny of all people would provide a guiding vision for a truly Catholic approach to educational issues. Additionally, the corpus of McCluskey’s work highlighted the need to address educational concerns across the life-cycle from childhood to older adulthood, and how to approach such concerns guided by a sense of the central importance of religious education in any educational process.

Generally, McCluskey is one of the Catholic leaders of the last half of the twentieth century who helped to foster the sense of United States Catholic identity that is often taken for granted today. Because of the educational efforts of McCluskey and other Catholic leaders, many Catholics continue to treasure their ethnic roots but no longer view their ethnic heritage as separating them from Catholics with different ethnic heritages. Many Catholics in the United States treasure the distinctiveness of Catholicism, but are also committed to the democratic values and freedom of the United States. Many Catholics are able to reflect critically on civic issues and are willing to work with people from other faith and philosophical traditions in addressing these issues. Further, many Catholics in our country hold a strong sense of the distinctiveness of U.S. Catholicism while retaining a commitment to the universal Catholic Church.
Throughout his career McCluskey spent considerable time and energy addressing issues of Catholic higher education. This work was part of McCluskey’s effort to contribute to the broadening of Catholic perspectives in the United States. Moreover, it is one of his most important contributions to the Catholic Church, both nationally and internationally.

McCluskey’s contribution to U.S. Catholic higher education began when he wrote for *America*. For example, Edward J. Power cited McCluskey’s *America* article on the lack of Rhodes Scholars at Catholic higher educational institutions as presenting a convincing argument for changes that helped to raise academic standards at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities (Power 1972, 458).

McCluskey’s most systematic and influential discussion of Catholic higher education is found in *Catholic Education*. In this book, McCluskey challenged Catholic institutions of higher education to focus on serving the educational needs of the United States while retaining a distinct Catholic identity. He urged collaboration between clergy and laity in Catholic higher education administration. He spoke of the importance of financial assistance and cautioned Catholic institutions against becoming schools that only the wealthy could attend. Moving beyond a focus on Catholic schools, McCluskey discussed the value of establishing Catholic centers at public colleges and universities. Also noteworthy is McCluskey’s advocacy for educational equality for men and women (McCluskey 1968, 215-55).

In *The Catholic University*, McCluskey presented a collection of essays by Catholic scholars and intellectuals addressing issues of higher educational administration. In the introduction to the book, McCluskey wrote,

> Of necessity the university leads a precarious life. If it responds too easily to social pressures, the university loses its leadership muscle. If it is impervious to the needs of the times, it becomes arteriosclerotic and is by-passed. It cannot be too far out in front; it dare not fall behind. (McCluskey 1970, 1)

Guided by McCluskey’s comments, readers of *The Catholic University* are led to see the critical importance of issues such as academic
freedom, institutional commitments, and a Catholic university's stance in an ecumenical, inter-religious and international world. The selection of themes and authors for the various essays of the book reveals McCluskey’s realistic understanding of the challenges facing the Catholic university and his clear sense of the contribution Catholic universities can make when these challenges are well met.

In addition to his scholarly work, McCluskey made significant contributions to Catholicism as a Catholic higher education administrator and consultant. For instance, McCluskey went to Gonzaga University in 1960 with a well-developed educational philosophy and vision for the further development of Catholic education in the United States. Gonzaga provided him with a chance to test and refine his views in practice. Hence, in overseeing the revision of the university’s academic programs and in contributing to the development of the Honors Program, McCluskey was able to implement and further develop his conception of a rigorously academic yet holistic education that included a focus on both the natural and supernatural development of a person. Similarly, McCluskey envisioned the Gonzaga in Florence study abroad program as offering Catholic young adults an opportunity to study and travel in Europe that would broaden their understanding of Catholicism and Western civilization. At the same time, McCluskey hoped that, as they conversed with people in Europe, young American Catholics would come to appreciate more fully the distinctiveness of both the American outlook on life and Catholicism in the United States.

While at Notre Dame, McCluskey was similarly drawn into conversations that contributed to the development of Catholic higher education in the United States. By the mid-twentieth century a number of frictions and rivalries had developed among U.S. Catholic institutions of higher learning as these institutions competed for students and resources. When Theodore Hesburgh became president of Notre Dame, he worked to ease these tensions. McCluskey quickly became Hesburgh’s ally when he joined the Notre Dame faculty. Together, Hesburgh and McCluskey drew the leadership of Catholic higher educational institutions into conversation. Their efforts helped to foster a new climate in U.S. Catholic higher education that enabled many Catholic colleges and universities to overcome difficulties and thereby prosper in the latter half of the twentieth century.
During his time at Notre Dame, McCluskey also contributed significantly to the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU). Shortly before McCluskey’s arrival at Notre Dame, Hesburgh was elected president of the IFCU. Hesburgh invited McCluskey to help him prepare for IFCU executive committee and federation meetings. At Hesburgh’s request, McCluskey planned a 1967 meeting at Notre Dame’s ecological center in Land O’Lakes, Wisconsin, for representatives of major Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada, along with a few high-level administrators from ecclesial offices in Rome. The Land O’Lakes group prepared a statement on the nature and role of the contemporary Catholic university from a North American perspective that was then presented at the next IFCU meeting. This statement, entitled “The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University,” is more commonly known as “The Land O’Lakes Statement.”

The Land O’Lakes Statement includes: a call for a strong commitment to academic excellence, especially in the branches of theology; encouragement for theologians exploring and critically reflecting upon the richness of Christian traditions; affirmations of the value of interdisciplinary study; and the articulation of a vision of the Catholic university as the critical reflective intelligence of the Church. Thousands of copies of the document were circulated, and it was discussed by faculties in dozens of colleges and universities.

In 1968, McCluskey participated in the eighth triennial conference of the IFCU at Lovanium University in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He and the other delegates discussed “The Land O’Lakes Statement” and other reports prepared by regional groups from around the world. Near the end of the conference McCluskey was elected chair of a committee that drafted the conference’s final declaration. The brief declaration was entitled “The Catholic University in the Modern World” and became known as “The Kinshasa Statement.”

As part of the follow up to the IFCU meeting in Kinshasa, McCluskey was one of six representatives elected by forty institutions of higher education in the United States to attend a 1969 consultation on Catholic higher education in Rome. The consultation, which has since become known as the “Rome Congress,” concluded with the adoption of a position paper entitled “The Catholic University and the..."
Aggiornamento,” more frequently referred to as “The Rome Statement.” The Rome Statement was discussed at a plenary session of the Congregation for Catholic Education in October, 1969, and insights from the statement were incorporated in the Congregation’s post-session report to Pope Paul VI. This report helped to shape a statement on Catholic higher education that Paul VI sent to the Catholic bishops of the world. (“The Land O’Lakes Statement,” “The Kinshasha Statement,” and “The Rome Statement” are included as appendices in McCluskey, 1970.) Finally, between January 1971 and November 1972 a series of follow-up discussions on Catholic higher education were held at Land O’Lakes, Caracas (Venezuela), and Grottaferrata (near Rome, Italy). McCluskey was present at each of these meetings. (McCluskey 1970, 1-28; and Galen 2000, 129-33.)

One well-respected authority of the development of U.S. Catholic higher education stated that Theodore Hesburgh, John Tracy Ellis, Neil McCluskey, and other nationally known Catholic intellectual leaders helped “to raise the quality of American Catholic higher education” (Geiger, “Faculty” in Hunt, et al. 2003, 203; Geiger, “Governance of Catholic Higher Education,” in Hunt, et al. 2003, 120). Another scholar named McCluskey as one of Catholic leaders whose work led to the “inclusion of lay men and women on the boards of Catholic institutions” and who ultimately “urged the colleges and universities into the mainstream of American higher education.” She also noted that, “now these institutions were perceived less and less as a subculture with its own symbols and language” (Gallin 2000, 43, 50).

Overall, McCluskey has had a significant influence on the development of both the theory and practice of Catholic higher education. His scholarly publications and work as a higher education administrator helped to foster greater creativity and ongoing discussion of critical issues in Catholic higher education. McCluskey’s most noteworthy contributions to Catholic higher education were made through his involvement with the IFCU. First, McCluskey played significant roles in IFCU meetings that brought the leadership teams of United States higher educational institutions into greater conversation with one another, created a new level of international conversation about Catholic higher education, and influenced the way the institutional Church at the highest levels addressed Catholic higher education.
Second, the Land O’Lakes Statement became a foundational document for the further development of United States institutions of higher education. Because of its influence, the teaching of Christian theology remained a part of the core curricula offered at these institutions, and higher education administrators retained a focus on the distinctive Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities. At the same time, the guidelines offered in the statement have helped to ensure academic freedom for professors and contributed to the development of governance structures that gave Catholic colleges and universities the maneuvering room they needed to adapt to changing social and cultural conditions. (O’Brien 1995.) In helping to draft the Land O’Lakes Statement, McCluskey contributed to laying the foundation that Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States have built upon as they have become one of the great assets of our contemporary church and society.

State Support for Private Schools

In his efforts to educate non-Catholics about Catholicism in the United States and to foster a sense of Catholic identity, McCluskey was an advocate for state support for private, especially religious, schools. This aspect of McCluskey’s educational ministry deserves special mention because of its influence upon and continuing relevance to contemporary debates of this issue. Today there has been a resurgence of interest in private primary and secondary schools as alternatives to public schools. There are also numerous debates about when and how public support can be provided for these private schools. The arguments advanced today in favor of private schools and public support for private schools build upon the arguments McCluskey presented in his work.

The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) School Choice Initiative web page (http://www.ncea.org/public/SchoolChoiceInitiatives.asp) is one of the best sources of information about contemporary arguments made in favor of private schools and public support for private schools. McCluskey’s name does not appear on this web site. However, it is clear that the current position of the NCEA incorporates ideas that McCluskey was among the first to advance. Included among the arguments are freedom of religion as the
foundation for educational choice, the rights of parents in choosing an education for their children, and the idea that private schools should be supported because of the contribution they make to the growth and development of the nation’s youth.

**Moral and Religious Education**

Throughout his career McCluskey was a tireless advocate for moral and religious education in public and private education in the United States. Moreover, McCluskey’s discussions of moral and religious education helped to shape public discussions of education in the United States from the 1960s through the 1990s, and continue to be relevant to current discussions of these issues.

McCluskey first became interested in moral and religious education during his studies at Alma College. At that time, he was introduced to an often fierce public debate about whether or not moral and religious instruction should be included in public and state-funded schools. On the one hand, from colonial times to the present many people have held that moral and religious education are essential to any educational process, and common (or public) schools have often assumed some responsibility for religious and moral education. On the other hand, as the United States has become more morally and religiously diverse and culturally pluralistic, more people have come to hold that moral and religious education should be excluded from all public and state-funded education so that the religious and moral views of any group or groups are not given preference over the views of others.

With the publication of his first book, *Public Schools and Moral Education*, McCluskey stepped into the middle of the debate and became a strong advocate for the positions that: 1) moral and religious education needs to be at the core of any educational process that seeks to encourage full human development; 2) ways can be found to introduce moral and religious education that show respect for the religious pluralism and diversity of the United States; and 3) moral and religious education can complement rather than detract from a focus on academic rigor.

Even though he advocated for the inclusion of moral and religious education in public education, McCluskey focused primarily in his
early work on analyzing the flaws in existing proposals for religious and/or moral education in U.S. public education. For instance, he noted that trying to base moral and religious education on nonsectarian Christian truths (a proposal advanced by Horace Mann) or even nonsectarian religious and/or moral truths is not tenable. McCluskey saw that increasing socio-cultural and religious diversity in the United States made it impossible to create a consensus about what should be included in a listing of such nonsectarian truths. Additionally, McCluskey accepted the claim that all religious and moral perspectives were grounded in some specific social and cultural context, and granted the validity of the argument that to present any one religious/moral perspective as objective and universal would be to overstate that perspective and show a lack of sensitivity toward those who held other moral and religious perspectives (McCluskey 1958, 11-98; 1959, 21-26; and 1968, 49-50).

Similarly, McCluskey rejected the claim that public education could provide moral training by enforcing a disciplinary code. This claim was advanced by some influential U.S. educators, including William Torrey Harris. These educators objected to the existence of religious school systems and claimed that schools should be completely secular. Yet, they also often held that by applying disciplinary standards schools could provide moral training and encourage the development of moral habits, and that these habits could then become the foundation for more extensive moral education that is provided within families and faith communities. McCluskey pointed out that approaches advanced by Harris and his colleagues pushed moral and religious education to the margins of school life and failed to address adequately the central importance of morality and faith to human existence. He also contended that efforts to provide minimal moral training through school disciplinary procedures could only foster a negative, punitive, and impoverished understanding of morality (McCluskey 1958, 99-176 and 1968, 93-94).

McCluskey also rejected the approach to moral education advanced by the influential educator John Dewey. Dewey reenvisioned the nature of moral values. For Dewey, moral intelligence is social intelligence focused on achieving social interests and aims and alleviating social ills. Moral values are neither ultimately transcendent nor universal guides for living. Rather, they have a solely pragmatic
value. They are tools whose value is determined by their usefulness when working on social issues. For Dewey, the only overarching value is democracy itself, primarily because it has proven to be the most useful political system for fostering fullness of human living. Schools, Dewey counseled, should provide moral education by teaching practical skills in democratic living. In critiquing Dewey’s position on moral education, McCluskey remarked that Catholics and others who hold traditional Christian beliefs, including a belief in the transcendent or supernatural dimension of the human person, are not likely to find Dewey’s approach to moral education to be satisfactory. In McCluskey’s words, such people of faith are likely to “regret that Dewey’s dedication to the immediate ills of human society caused him to underestimate the ‘unpractical’ world of saint and stargazer, wherein an immortal soul might seek union with a Spirit that transcends the . . . pettiness of earth” (McCluskey 1958, 258 and 1968, 196-98).

Building upon his critique of existing approaches, McCluskey spent nearly a decade exploring other ways of providing moral and religious formation in public and state-funded education. He then outlined a detailed proposal for addressing this issue in *Catholic Education*. In a chapter focusing on public education and values he states:

If one accepts the secular character of the contemporary American public school, does it follow that this type of school should be altogether excluded from religious education? If the public school is considered an extension of the political state, the answer is yes; it would have to be, like the state, neutral. But functioning as an extension of the social community, the public school can and should work together with the community’s legitimate undertakings in religious education. (McCluskey 1968, 211)

Essentially, McCluskey granted that the state needs to strive to be as neutral as possible. That is, those who represent the state need to be able to step back from the specific interests of any person or group so that they can evaluate issues with as great a degree of impartial fairness as possible. However, McCluskey argued that public schools should be seen not as part of the state, but as part of the social community, and in the social community another set of operational norms is needed.

In the social community people come together from diverse backgrounds. They are members of some religious community or
tradition. They are from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds. Therefore, McCluskey suggested, within the social community respect for difference and a willingness to work together on issues of common concern are both necessary. According to McCluskey, schools can foster respect for differences and provide foundational religious education by teaching about religious diversity. That is, if educators can identify the religious faiths and traditions that are present in a social community, they can lay a foundation for religious education by teaching about these traditions in schools. Then, if pressing socio-moral issues can be identified as issues of common concern (today, for example, drug abuse, driving under the influence of alcohol, the environmental crisis, and violence come to mind), schools can provide a foundation for moral education by offering an academically rigorous explorations of why these are socio-moral concerns. McCluskey also argued that schools can create an awareness of moral and religious issues that parents and churches can then build upon in providing more substantive moral and religious formation.

When he was actively involved in discussions of public and Catholic education, McCluskey was described as “one of the principal spokesmen” for the view that intellectual and moral/religious development could be effectively combined (Lee 1968, 32). As a result of the influence of McCluskey and other significant educators, it is fairly common in today’s public and private elementary and secondary schools to have programs of character or citizenship education, to teach morality by focusing on broad social concerns such as preventing drug abuse, and in some cases even to have programs or courses in world religions or U.S. religions. Ironically, it is often taken for granted that contemporary programs in moral/religious education can be part of a rigorous academic curriculum. However, attention to McCluskey’s analysis of the flaws of the moral and religious education programs of the past would greatly enhance many of the moral education programs found in both public and private schools in the United States today.

McCluskey’s Educational Ministry

When Neil McCluskey was recognized as a pioneering religious educator in 1971, it was clear that his educational ministry had born fruit. As a journalist, scholar, administrator, and popular lecturer and
presenter, McCluskey had crisscrossed the nation contributing to educational theory and practice, and helping Catholics and those from other faith and philosophical traditions to understand themselves, each other, and critical educational issues. Moreover, from our contemporary vantage point we can recognize that McCluskey’s many achievements continue to shape educational attitudes, perspectives, and practices.

Yet, we should also realize that there are a number of notable weaknesses in McCluskey’s perspective. First, McCluskey tended to synthesize ideas together to create comprehensive approaches to issues. In some cases this created unresolved tensions and confusions that have sometimes led McCluskey’s work to be misinterpreted. For example, a discerning reader of *Catholic Viewpoint* will note that McCluskey used the term “supernatural” in two ways. On the one hand, McCluskey talked about “supernatural wisdom.” For instance, he wrote, “The Church founds schools so that these persons as her communicants will better acquire the supreme integrating principle of supernatural wisdom in ordering the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they learn” (McCluskey 1959, 76). In McCluskey’s discussions of supernatural wisdom as an integrating principle, there are echoes of the humanistic philosophy of secular, public schools. On the other hand, McCluskey discussed what he referred to as the “revealed supernatural order.” For example, he asserted, “The starting point in the Catholic philosophy of education, then, is the reality of the supernatural as revealed through and in Jesus Christ” (McCluskey 1959, 79). McCluskey contended that there are fundamental supernatural truths that “form a perennial unchanging charter” that has from the beginning of the Christian era to the present “guided Catholic education” (McCluskey 1959, 78). In referring to supernatural truths as substantive principles to guide Catholic education, McCluskey’s analysis resonated with established Catholic educational approaches of the mid-twentieth century (see, for example, John D. Redden and Francis A. Ryan, *A Catholic Philosophy of Education*). The tension between these two understandings of the supernatural is never fully resolved in McCluskey’s many discussions of the aims of education, resulting in a certain amount of ambiguity in his thought.

McCluskey has also been criticized for being overly optimistic about the possibilities for mutual understanding and cooperative action
among diverse groups. Critics of McCluskey have noted that he tended to downplay the difficulties that often need to be overcome to reach mutual understanding and he seldom if ever offered a method or practical suggestions for overcoming barriers to genuine dialogue. He also overlooked the fact that dialogue can sometimes deepen the divisions among diverse groups.

However, while we need to be aware of the limitations of McCluskey’s thought, we can appreciate the continuing relevance of his educational ministry by focusing on his positive contributions. Currently, the institutions that once stood as symbols of stability and social and moral values are often questioned or even disregarded. Governmental agencies, political parties, schools, business corporations, and churches no longer command the respect they once did. We are more inclined today than in the recent past to “deconstruct” the religious and moral perspectives voiced by those in positions of authority or even by our neighbors and colleagues. McCluskey, who spoke of the value of critical reflection throughout his career, applauded the level of critical reflection people displayed at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Yet, he also noted that critical reflection can never be an end in itself, and that deconstruction must lead to reconstruction if it is to give rise to deeper understanding and action.

Undoubtedly, McCluskey’s work can inspire us, as it inspired many people in the past, to reach beyond ethnic and religious divisions in search of deeper understanding. As a Catholic, McCluskey began reaching out to Jews in the 1950s, inviting Jews and Catholics to work together. Today McCluskey’s work can inspire Catholics and other Christians to reach out to Jews, Muslims, and people of other faith traditions. McCluskey continually called people of diverse backgrounds to acknowledge their differences while working together to address issues of common concern. His work can inspire religious educators to acknowledge the increasing plurality and ambiguity of our times and, yet, to work with people from other faith and philosophical traditions in addressing pressing educational social issues.