Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard, Bishop of Albany, N.Y.

‘I’m emphasizing the sacredness of all aspects of human life’

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, who was born in Troy, N.Y. in 1938, was ordained to the priesthood in Rome, Italy in 1963 and became the ninth Roman Catholic Bishop of Albany, New York in 1977.

Soon after he became a priest, he co-founded the Hope House Drug Rehabilitation facility, which now, thirty years later, serves eight thousand people yearly in residential, outpatient, community, and school-based programs.

When capital punishment was reinstated in New York State in 1994, the Bishop helped organize “New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty” and he now serves as its president. He is active in many other civic projects, and is the president of the Urban League of Albany.

Bishop Hubbard is the chairman of the Public Policy Committee of the N.Y. Catholic Conference and, among his national responsibilities, serves on the Social Policy and World Peace Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference and the Committee on the Laity of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Our statement cuts across political and partisan tone and the blatant untruths of the Alliance’s Congressional scorecard. I was also disturbed by the intentional manipulation in the literature, which implied that the Alliance spoke for the Holy Father and was officially “Catholic.” The organization stated its purpose as representing the Catholic community before the Congress, state legislatures, and local political bodies, and I thought that would sow great confusion. I was also concerned about the Catholic faithful, who would think that this material could represent the social doctrine of the Church.
Fidelio: Where do the differences lie?
Bishop Hubbard: Well, if we compare agendas, one might think we agree on the subject of abortion. But we absolutely disagree on most of the issues of life, such as the question of the death penalty, which the Bishops oppose. . . . Issues we take a strong position on, like legislation to protect poor children and immigrants, are certainly not on the Christian Coalition’s agenda.

If we compare agendas, one might think we agree on the subject of abortion. But we absolutely disagree on most of the issues of life, such as the question of the death penalty, which the Bishops oppose. . . . Issues we take a strong position on, like legislation to protect poor children and immigrants, are certainly not on the Christian Coalition’s agenda. The other major issues which they take a strong stand on, after abortion, seem to be a balanced budget amendment, term limits, malpractice reform; these kinds of things, which we take no stand on. But issues we take a strong position on, like legislation to protect poor children and immigrants, are certainly not on the Coalition’s agenda.

Fidelio: Did you bring this up after the Catholic Alliance had established a separate board of directors?
Bishop Hubbard: Yes, afterwards, but they are still a fully-owned subsidiary of the Christian Coalition. I was concerned that a supposedly separate, so-called “Catholic” organization, would undermine our attempt to invoke a unified social-moral ethic in defense of the dignity and sacredness of every facet and stage of human life. When this organization was set up and called a “Catholic Alliance,” they had absolutely no communication with our Bishops Conference or any of its representatives.

In these days of ecumenical dialogue, I was offended by this unilateral initiative, and saw it as an effort to split Catholics from their bishops, who are the official teachers of the Church. I think there should be truth in advertising.

I was also concerned about IRS questions. We have 501C3 tax status, and can’t be involved in supporting specific candidates, while they have 501C4 status and say that they desire to form a so-called Catholic-Christian voting bloc. But they are on a collision course with the approach we emphasized in our political responsibility statement.

Fidelio: In the 1994 election, in the area where I live in Northern Virginia, many people were outraged to find, in the diocesan newspaper, the Christian Coalition voters’ guide endorsing specific candidates and issues. And, of course, since the Coalition’s flagship candidate in Virginia was Oliver North, whom the Christian Coalition was supporting for the U.S. Senate and whom we had exposed as a drug runner near the top of the Iran-Contra hierarchy, people were even more upset.

Bishop Hubbard: We will not allow the parishes to distribute Christian Coalition or Catholic Alliance material in our diocese. The parishes plan to distribute the Bishops statement on political responsibility in preparation for the presidential election. We have our own grass roots efforts on public policy issues. In New York State, we have developed public policy education networks in each diocese, reaching into local parishes. But I worry that the activity of the Catholic Alliance may militate against these kinds of grass roots efforts.

Fidelio: Do you think the material disseminated by the Catholic Alliance contributed to the attacks on the poor and vulnerable in the most recent period?
Bishop Hubbard: I’m very concerned about that process. This is not a hypothetical question. When I spoke on this matter to the Bishops Conference, I said that it appeared that the Christian Coalition had already turned the tide in Congress on the child-exclusion and family-cap provisions in the welfare reform legislation. Our Conference vigorously opposed these exclusions. And since that time, obviously, much of this kind of legislation has been consolidated.

Fidelio: What are you doing to counter this destruction?
Bishop Hubbard: This month is designated “Respect for Life” month, and what I am doing as a bishop is emphasizing the sacredness of all aspects of human life. I have asked every pastor to preach on this. The kinds of programs we are talking about in this conference on the Third Millennium, will be based on the hope of reconciliation and justice. We must be the advocates for the poor and helpless—for those who have no voice. We must evangelize through these years, to turn away from a culture of death and become a culture of life.