

Anna Friel

'I do think women are feeling very empowered at the moment'

32



Don McLean

Reflecting on his young dreams and a life well-lived in *Botanical Gardens*

33



The mortgage time-bomb

Information all interest-only borrowers need to know

33



How safe is your nest box?

Tips on making a bird's home a happy one

35



Fewer faithful, priests and bishops means we will have to pull together

Fr Michael Phillips, page 10

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GIVING THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEWS AND ISSUES OF THE DAY



Cora leads the challenge to our 'culture of death'

Catholic peer urges society to celebrate all diversity and not exclude its most vulnerable groups

Nick Benson

We must challenge our society's "confused culture of death", which wishes to celebrate diversity one minute and then lethally discriminates against vulnerable minorities the next.

Lord David Alton of Liverpool made this observation as he urged *Universe* readers – as well as all of society – to assess the voting records of our MPs and peers and hold them to account on the issue of screening against children with Down's Syndrome, in the hope that it may bring about change.

His call came as he praised fashion company River Island for the inclusion of a six-year-old girl with Down's in its 'Labels Are For Clothes' campaign, which celebrates diversity.

The Catholic life peer also encouraged other high street firms to follow suit in an effort to generate a much-needed debate on British laws, which allow the killing of a Down's baby up to, and even during, birth.

Cora Bishop, six, has landed her first marketing campaign with the retail giant, along with four other children.

"Full marks to River Island and its Labels Are for Clothes campaign," Lord Alton told *The Universe*.

"By choosing Cora as one of five children to promote its latest campaign, River Island is putting a face and a person to a 'condition'. In doing so it is asserting the humanity and dignity to which every human being is entitled at every stage of their life," said Lord Alton.

The life peer warned that ninety per cent of people with Down's are systematically eliminated in the UK before birth and those who are allowed to be born are often "out of sight and out of mind".

He revealed that there is "endless talk" about diversity, plurality, discrimination and equality in political



Cora Bishop. The six-year-old has landed her first major modelling campaign as one of the faces of River Island's latest collection
Photo: Sheryl Bishop/PA Wire

circles and called for these principles to be extended to people with Down's Syndrome at every stage of their lives.

Cora, a primary school pupil from



'Young people with Down's bring a special light, a charisma, to many areas'
Lord Alton

Wrexham, Wales, landed the campaign after her mother Sheryl Bishop signed her up to the Zebedee Management

agency in Sheffield, which specialises in working with people with disabilities.

Lord Alton said that the young girl's success will be no surprise to anyone who knows a family with a child with Down's Syndrome.

"Young people with Down's bring a special light, charisma, and great humour to many areas of the creative arts," he said. Cora is one of countless young men and women acting as counter-witnesses to an "otherwise dark and oppressive culture of death

for members of the disability community".

"This culture taken as a whole is confused, it both wishes to celebrate diversity in all of its forms while at the same time lethally discriminating against vulnerable minorities in the womb," he said.

"Nationally we see 'screening' programmes being rolled out by the Government that could intentionally eliminate children like Cora and other children with Down's," he explained.

Continued on page 2

Destruction of Ghouta has to be last act of Syrian war

The pope has called for an immediate and total end to the fighting in Syria, with full access to humanitarian aid for those in need and the evacuation of the injured and infirm from all areas, but particularly eastern Ghouta.

"My thoughts turn to that beloved and martyred Syria where the war has intensified. It is inhumane, evil," he told pilgrims praying the Angelus in Rome's St Peter's Square.

"This latest horror in Ghouta has to be the last act of this conflict."

He said that rather than calming down, the conflict has if anything intensified, making February the most violent in seven years of conflict: "hundreds, thousands of civilian victims – children, woman, the elderly. Hospitals have been hit and people can't get anything to eat," he said.

"All of this is inhumane," he said. "Evil cannot be fought with evil. And war is an evil."

The pope launched a "heartfelt appeal that the violence immediately end, that access to humanitarian aid – food and medicine – be given and that the injured and ill be evacuated" from an area under rebel control.

The pope's appeal came after intensified fighting in eastern Ghouta, a rebel-held suburb of Damascus.

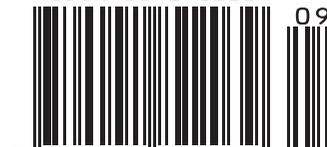
Although the UN Security Council voted unanimously on 24th February for a 30-day ceasefire in Syria, Government forces continued their week-long offensive. Humanitarian groups reported civilians were hospitalised for symptoms suspected to be associated with a chlorine gas attack.

At least 500 people had been killed in the fighting in the week before the pope spoke, and the remaining residents – 400,000 people, down from two million before the civil war started in 2011 – continue to suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has called for a daily pause in fighting to allow civilians to escape and aid to come in to the area.

Sister's terror in Syria: Page 17

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