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IN the darkest days of World War Two when the Nazis were determined to round up and exterminate Jews all over Europe, it was often Catholic priests and nuns who put their own lives at risk to save their Jewish brethren.

Nuns all over Europe took Jewish children into their convents to hide and protect them and a Catholic priest helped to get Danish Jews across to neutral Sweden.

I mention this because in the last few weeks there has been so much adverse publicity about Catholic priests, monks and bishops abusing children in their care.

And there have been so many accusations about Catholic clergy – even the Pope himself – being involved in a cover-up that I am beginning to fear a wave of anti-Catholic feeling fuelled by more and more press reports of paedophilia cases which are now coming to light.

How ironic that, for once, antisemitism is taking a back seat as ill-feeling is directed at the Catholic church instead.

Sexual abuse of children is a horrendous crime and, frankly, I don't wonder that the bishops tried to hush it up to protect the Catholic church.

But wouldn't it have been more important to protect the children? As new cases emerge almost daily, I felt it important to remind

Let's not forget the Catholic kindness



NOTED: The Pope puts a note in the Western Wall on his visit to Jerusalem

people of the goodness of the many Catholics who tried to help Jews during the last war, and also of those Catholics who today are more than happy to work alongside their Jewish colleagues in promoting religious tolerance.

Father Mario Borelli, of Naples, was a dear friend of mine and remained so until his death last year. He was the priest who founded the Casa dello Scugnizzo, the House of Urchins, to get the homeless children off the streets.

I set up something rather like today's Big Knit to get people knitting squares for blankets so that those children could have some protection against the cold winter nights.

And that is why Father Borrelli gave me the name Leita Lana, "lana" being Italian for wool.

This priest who, incidentally, was a friend of the Rabbi of Naples, was a good, compassionate man, and I am sure that the majority of priests are, too.

But, of course, we don't hear about them. They don't make the headlines. There is nothing as bad as the sexual abuse of children, but rather lower down the scale of abuse is physical violence, as practised by sadistic teachers – even those of our own faith.

I remember only too well hearing about little boys having their knuckles viciously rapped with the edge of a ruler, having hard objects like a wooden blackboard

cleaner hurled at them with great force, and being subjected to a caning – all for relatively minor offences.

If any of those sadistic teachers tried to inflict those kinds of punishment today they would be had up in court. Thank heavens corporal punishment is now against the law.

The downside to all this is, of course, that now and then there will be one little so-and-so who can't resist trying it on and seeing how far he can go to annoy the teacher, knowing full well that he can't be touched for his impudence.

It must be very hard for a teacher, provoked beyond endurance, having to resist the urge to administer a well-deserved slap to the miscreant. I'm glad I'm not a teacher.

To those of you who are, you deserve our admiration. Ladies and gentlemen, I salute you!

Beaten by volcano

I WAS delighted when I got a phone call from an old friend, Isabel Matzliach, who now lives in Jerusalem.

She was planning to fly to the UK for her cousin's golden wedding and wondered if she could come and stay with me for a few days.

Of course she could. I made all kinds of plans to help her to enjoy her holiday here. Then disaster struck – in the shape of the Icelandic volcano.

The day it blew up was the day she flew out of Israel and, instead of landing in Manchester, she found herself holed up in Zurich for the next few days. In the end, she was not able to fly out in time for the golden wedding celebration.

Naturally, she was disappointed, but Isabel was used to dealing with all kinds of crises. Before she made aliyah many years ago she had worked for both the BBC and ITV. She settled happily in Jerusalem and eventually became secretary to the then prime minister Levi Eshkol.

She married an Israeli, brought up a family and is now a grandma several times over. In recent years she has battled cancer and endured bereavement, losing her much-loved husband. So a disappointment like being stuck in Zurich was a mere triviality.

She is a very special lady and I have told her that, if she ever wants to risk another trip over here, her room will be waiting.

Rabbis should remember there are ladies present

IS it only in my shul that the ladies are ignored, or does it happen in others?

I know I have complained before about the fact that rabbonim seem to forget that there is a ladies' gallery upstairs, but the previous gentle reminder hasn't worked, so I am now driven to complain again.

Until our shul appoints a new rabbi we have guest rabbis, nearly all of whom seem to address their sermons only to the men.

I think that over the past few weeks there has

been only one rabbi who has actually lifted up his head and acknowledged our presence.

Unfortunately, the acoustics in our shul aren't very good and unless a rabbi makes a concerted effort to look upwards and speak to us as well as to the men, we have to struggle to hear what he is saying.

At first I thought the problem was mine alone and that maybe my particular seat was out of the easy-hearing zone, but I have since discovered that, wherever you sit in the ladies'

gallery, it is difficult to catch every word of the sermon.

All the ladies agree with me that, unless the rabbi directs his voice upwards instead of merely outwards, we all have a problem.

The other thing which annoys us is sermons that go on and on and on.

When you are sitting there trying all the time to hear, it becomes very annoying.

And I don't blame the ladies all over the gallery who I noticed had given up trying to

hear and were indulging in a little quiet *shushkying* among themselves.

Rabbis, most of you are lovely, learned and thoroughly nice men. But we should be very grateful if you would (a) look up and speak up occasionally and (b) confine your sermon to 15 minutes which, we all agree, should be quite enough time to get your message home.

No offence meant and, I hope, none taken. But maybe it is just as well that I am out of your missile-chucking range..



James Max

Jewish families lead by example

OUR nation has a massive debt to pay and a fractious society that's failing its young and old. The Jewish family unit may provide some answers for our increasingly grey politicians.

The Conservatives should be ahead in the polls. But they aren't. The Lib Dems should be languishing as an irrelevance. But they are not.

And Labour should be nowhere. But there is a chance Gordon Brown will still be prime minister come May 7.

This election is turning out to be quite a tussle. Not since the 1970s have we seen such a hard-fought contest. It's never simple knowing where to put your "X".

After all, the national polls say one thing but you might have to vote tactically where you live should you reside in a safe seat.

The Jewish community has a strong sense of business and is very enthusiastic about high standards of education. Yet its the approach to family that may provide the key to solving our biggest social problems.

When I was growing up, the Friday night dinner was a time to gather as a family and discuss whatever needed to be discussed.

Rarely was it a family argument or discussion. It was generally about the world of business or politics. How many families do that nowadays?

There are simply too many other things going on. Children would prefer to be in their rooms playing computer games or watching telly and adults would prefer not to have their children in their hair.

Yet perhaps it's this aspect of religion that we should be looking at for inspiration in solving our social problems.

I am not a particularly religious person, yet I do recognise that as I was growing up there were a number of elements that made for a happy childhood.

Indeed those attributes have served me well. Community and taking responsibility for one's actions has to be key.

My grandparents, for all their faults, were first-class. They were insistent about the need for a family to be together at certain times.

While a "no show" was acceptable from time to time, systemat-

ic or routine refusal to attend family events was deeply frowned upon. With hindsight, for good reason.

Successive governments have changed our focus as a nation towards the state picking up the pieces of broken families and giving individual freedoms to people. Of course that is good, to a point.

However, where did the notion come that care for the elderly should lie at the door of the state? Or responsibility for child-care, education or social policy should be the responsibility of government?

As a radio presenter, I often talk about unsavory news stories. For example, the increased incidence of stabbings by youths on our city streets and the rise of anti-social behaviour.

The lack of engagement by many elements of society and an ability to walk the other side of the road to avoid getting involved prevails.

Government's answer has been a raft of new legislation, CCTV, agencies and tsars. Massive expenditure that has at best achieved nothing and at worst disintegrated society from the bottom up.

The causes of social unrest largely come down to failure of the family unit. That isn't to say that every child must get married, have 2.4 children and live happily ever after.

We know some children won't get married for whatever reason, some who do will get divorced and that economic circumstances mean that not every family will have the means to care for those who need care and attention.

Ultimately, drugs are the most significant problem to solve.

Drugrunners carry guns and knives and youngsters take them because there is nothing better to do. A simplification of the situation, perhaps.

However, if you take the children off the streets and engage them in meaningful activities, your social problems begin to be solved.

When I look at the politicians and what they stand for, I am often confused.

Labour have continued their battle for individual rights. Promoting the single parent and the mother who wishes to work while having a family.

While I wholeheartedly agree with equality for women, I don't understand why the very thing

that makes women and their role in society different from men needs to be compensated.

Equality to men doesn't have to equate to homogenised treatment. We should recognise and celebrate the differences while ensuring that discrimination in the workplace does not continue.

To deny that women have children or that families need a matriarchal figure is wholly destructive.

The Lib-Dems have said very little about the importance of the family. Perhaps because it was not until a couple of weeks ago when Nick Clegg caused the massive upset in the polls that they thought they would ever be scrutinised over such policy matters.

As for David Cameron, if there is one thing I support, it's his attitude and realisation that supporting families is probably the most important policy statement he can make.

Perhaps a look at how Jewish families operate and care for each other might provide further inspiration as to how to fix our nation's social problems.

James Max is a presenter on LBC Radio, regularly appears on Sky News and GMTV and is a prolific podcaster and blogger.