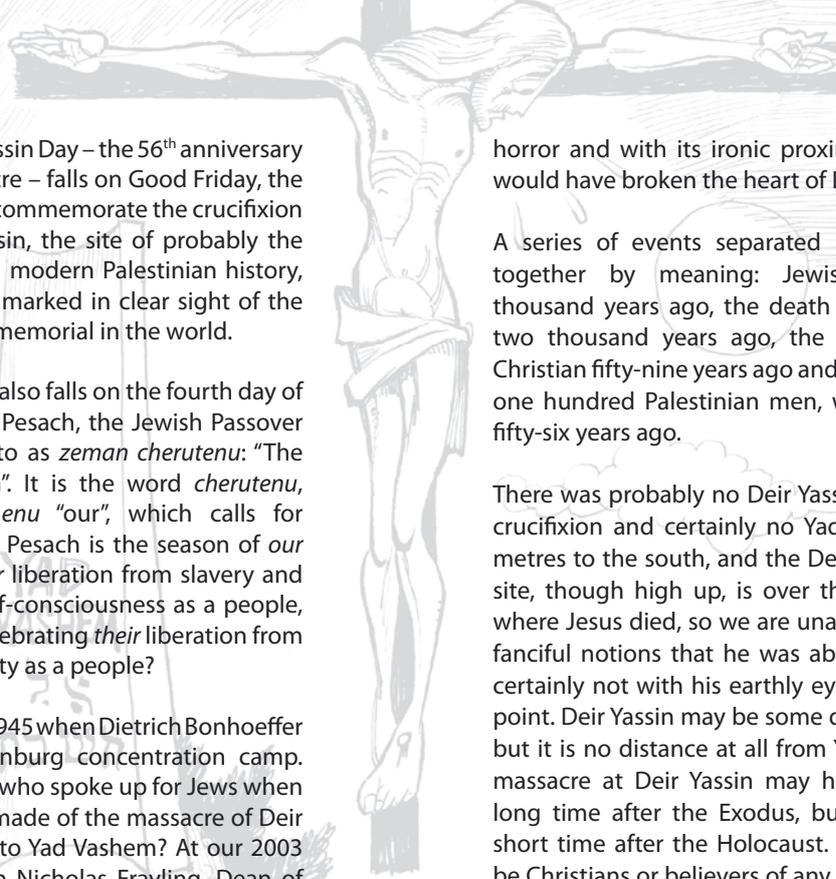


Jesus' broken heart



This year 9th April, Deir Yassin Day – the 56th anniversary of the Deir Yassin massacre – falls on Good Friday, the day on which Christians commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus. Today Deir Yassin, the site of probably the most important event in modern Palestinian history, stands unnamed and unmarked in clear sight of the most famous Holocaust memorial in the world.

This year Deir Yassin Day also falls on the fourth day of the eight-day festival of Pesach, the Jewish Passover which Jews often refer to as *zeman cherutenu*: “The Season of our Freedom”. It is the word *cherutenu*, particularly the suffix *enu* “our”, which calls for examination: if for Jews, Pesach is the season of *our* freedom, celebrating *our* liberation from slavery and the beginning of *our* self-consciousness as a people, what of *their* freedom celebrating *their* liberation from bondage and *their* identity as a people?

April 9th is also the day in 1945 when Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed in Flossenburg concentration camp. What would Bonhoeffer, who spoke up for Jews when so few others did, have made of the massacre of Deir Yassin and its proximity to Yad Vashem? At our 2003 London commemoration Nicholas Frayling, Dean of Chichester Cathedral, speaking of Bonhoeffer, offered an answer: “I have no doubt that Deir Yassin, in all its

horror and with its ironic proximity to Yad Vashem, would have broken the heart of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”

A series of events separated by time but bound together by meaning: Jewish liberation three thousand years ago, the death of a Palestinian Jew two thousand years ago, the death of a German Christian fifty-nine years ago and the massacre of over one hundred Palestinian men, women and children fifty-six years ago.

There was probably no Deir Yassin at the time of the crucifixion and certainly no Yad Vashem, only 1400 metres to the south, and the Deir Yassin/Yad Vashem site, though high up, is over three kilometres from where Jesus died, so we are unable to indulge in any fanciful notions that he was able to see the village, certainly not with his earthly eyes. But that’s not the point. Deir Yassin may be some distance from Calvary but it is no distance at all from Yad Vashem; and the massacre at Deir Yassin may have occurred a very long time after the Exodus, but it occurred a very short time after the Holocaust. So we don’t have to be Christians or believers of any kind to know that, as with Bonhoeffer, the sight of this bitterest of ironies would have broken Jesus’ heart.