



MOVIE NIGHTS

FOR TEENS

THE MISSION

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 2 hours, 5 minutes

Starring: Jeremy Irons as Father Gabriel; Robert DeNiro as Mendoza; Liam Neeson as Fielding; Aidan Quinn as Felipe

Director: Roland Joffé

Themes: Conversion, missionary outreach, defending the weak, martyrdom, pacifism vs. self-defense

Cautions: A man walks in on a couple in bed (discreet). The opening scene shows a priest being swept over a waterfall,

bound to a cross. There are several passing glimpses of female Indians' breasts, and a parting scene shows pre-adolescent natives completely naked (all with a *National Geographic* feel). There are two mild profanities. Haunting violence in the last 20 minutes features soldiers trying to remove the Indians from the mission. Fighting men on both sides get knifed, shot, hit with arrows, run through with swords and swept over the falls. Even unarmed children are shot in cold blood. Best viewed by older teens and adults.

Story Summary

Based on actual events, this film takes place in 1750 around the borders of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. A cardinal, dictating a letter to the pope, narrates the story which begins with a powerful image: A missionary priest, tied to a cross, is sent down the river and over a raging waterfall by the Guaraní Indians he was trying to reach.

The death of this priest doesn't deter the Jesuits.

Father Gabriel makes the difficult jour-

ney into the jungle and begins to reach out to the Guaraní. At the same time, the natives are terrorized by a slave trader, Captain Rodrigo Mendoza. Upon returning from one of his forays, Mendoza learns that his brother loves the same woman he does. In a fit of anger Mendoza kills his brother. When he realizes what he has done, he seeks sanctuary in the church and languishes in a cell.

Six months later, Gabriel is asked to talk to Mendoza. But the mercenary is morose, believing there's no redemption for him. Gabriel comes up with a unique therapy. For days, Mendoza totes a huge net through the jungle filled with armor and weapons representing his past and his sins. He doggedly carries the burden until, during a tense encounter with the very Indians he abused, a member of the tribe cuts the rope and pushes the huge bundle over the ledge and into the river below. This powerful act of grace reduces Mendoza to tears of relief and joy. He's a new man. Beautiful evidences of Mendoza's conversion follow as we hear him reading 1 Corinthians 13, and see him serving those he once enslaved. Finally, he asks Gabriel to ordain him a Jesuit priest.

Meanwhile, a three-way political conflict involves Spain, Portugal and the church. Currently the missionary efforts are protected by Spain. But a treaty has given this land over to Portugal, which intends to use the Indians as slave labor on their plantations. The cardinal must decide whether or not to protect the missions, which are the Indians' only hope. Inevitably, political and business interests

supercede ministry to the natives. The Jesuits are ordered to abandon their work and the people they've invested in. Neither Gabriel nor Mendoza is willing to leave, but troops are on their way to forcibly evict the Indians. Gabriel turns to prayer. Mendoza wants to fight:

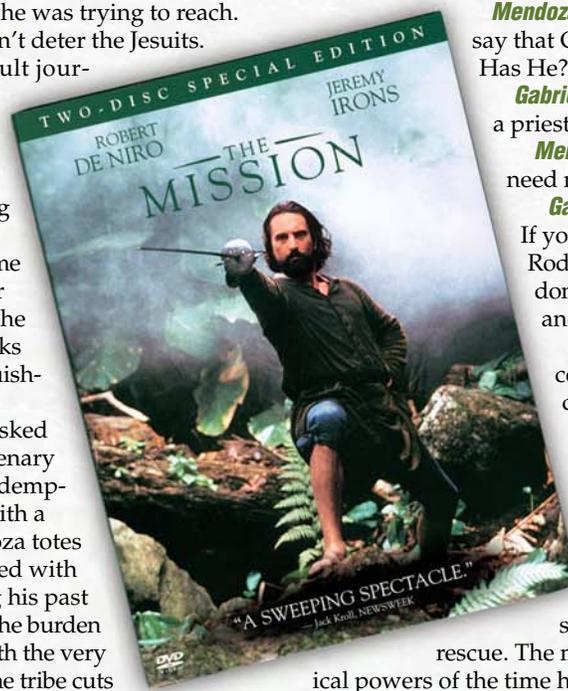
Mendoza: They want to live, Father. They say that God has left them, deserted them. Has He?

Gabriel: You should never have become a priest.

Mendoza: But I am a priest and they need me.

Gabriel: Then help them *as* a priest. If you die with blood on your hands, Rodrigo, you betray everything we've done. You promised your life to God, and God is *love!*

The film's final 20 minutes are compelling, yet disturbing. Mendoza prepares for battle, rallying some of the Jesuit brothers and men from the tribe. Gabriel gathers women and children into the church to pray. It is a hopeless situation. The Indians, with primitive weapons, cannot thwart the European soldiers. There is no miraculous rescue. The mission is overrun. And the political powers of the time have won ... or have they?



Before You Watch

The first Sunday of November is the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church around the world. Consider making persecuted Christians part of your family's regular prayer regimen. Then, across the dinner table prior to your Movie Night, ask teens for their impressions of missions. What does it take to be a missionary? What dangers exist? If you know missionaries, tell a story about their work. If not, find out if your church sponsors any, or visit Voice of the Martyrs at www.persecution.com.

Bible Bookmarks Psalm 11; Matt. 5:10, 16:24-26, 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 13; Acts 1:8; Heb. 11:36-40; Rev. 2:10, 6:9-11

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Talking Points

The following are difficult questions. Theologians have debated for centuries why God allows bad things to happen to good people. You may not come up with nice, neat answers. Still, the questions are worth asking so that you and your teen can begin exploring these issues in the safety of your home.

1 Discuss the brief exchange reprinted in the story summary. With which character did you most identify, Father Gabriel (who prefers peaceful resistance and leading people in prayer) or Rodrigo Mendoza (who chooses to defend the village and resist the soldiers)? Why? Talk about the *opposite* choice and any merits or weaknesses of that position.

2 Read Psalm 11. How do you respond to David's question in verse 3? What can the righteous do in a situation like the one faced by this mission? Note how David's perspective changes in verse 4. Do his words affect how you view the events portrayed in the film? If so, how?

3 The cardinal knew the expectations of his superiors. What could he have done differently? Read Matthew 16:24-26. Do Jesus' words provide any insight into the cardinal's situation?

4 Talk about Mendoza's conversion. Was anything missing you wish had been included? What changes did you see in his life? What convinced you it was genuine?

5 The following passage from John Bunyan's book *Pilgrim's Progress* depicts the conversion of its main character, a man named Christian. Read it aloud and then discuss the similarity of this scene with the dramatic conversion of Mendoza:

"Now I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall; and that wall was called 'Salvation.' Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run; but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad....

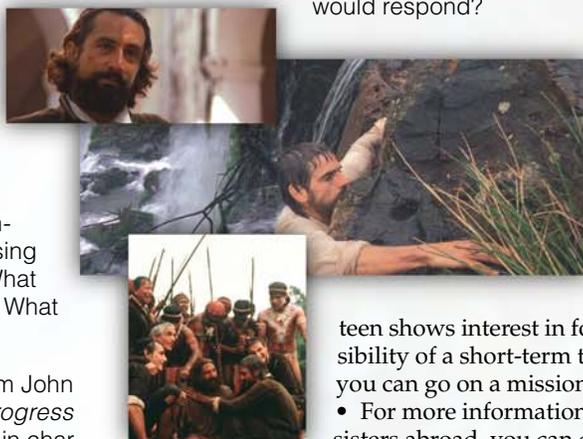
6 After his transformation, Mendoza reads 1 Corinthians 13 as we see him interacting with the Indians. Read it together and discuss how Mendoza lived out this "love chapter."

7 How did you feel about the ending? Did you have a sense of hopelessness? Why or why not? Was the sac-

rifice made by the priests and Indians worth the cost? Why? Why do you think God allowed this tragedy to occur? Can you think of any good that might have come of it?

8 There are people suffering injustice today. In Sudan, Christian tribes are being murdered and forced into slavery. In Colombia, Christians are caught between drug lords and government troops. In many Muslim countries it is illegal for Christians to meet together or talk to Muslims about their faith. Jesus said in Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." How do you think this verse applies to the Indians and missionaries in this film?

9 The Bible openly talks about the possibility that we might die for our Lord. Each year more than 150,000 people around the world are martyred for their Christian faith. Read Revelation 2:10, 6:9-11 and Hebrews 11:36-40. Do you think Gabriel, Mendoza and the Guaraní Indians in their mission could be classified as martyrs? Can you conceive of any situation where you might be challenged to die for your faith? How do you think you would respond?



Follow-Up Activity

- Read Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8, key passages addressing Christian missionary activity. If you support a missionary, learn more about what he or she does. Or ask about a missionary supported by your church. If your

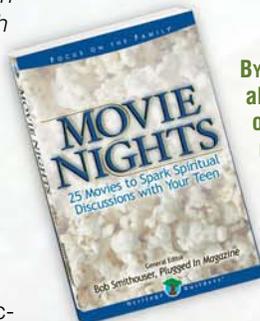
teen shows interest in foreign missions, discuss the possibility of a short-term tour of duty. Better yet, perhaps you can go on a missions trip together.

- For more information about persecuted brothers and sisters abroad, you can contact Open Doors at P.O. Box 27001, Santa Ana, CA 92799. Or visit that organization's web site at www.opendoorsusa.org.

Just for Fun

Several actors in this movie know what it's like to be king of the jungle. Jeremy Irons provided the voice for Scar, the villainous cat in Disney's *The Lion King*. Years later Disney employed Liam Neeson as the voice of Aslan in the *Narnia* films. And Robert DeNiro, known for playing tough guys onscreen, caught the acting bug at age 10 when he portrayed the Cowardly Lion in a local stage production of *The Wizard of Oz*. —by Bob Smithouser

A **plugged in** Resource
online



BY THE BOOK: "We have a brief window, usually when our children are between the ages of 13 and 18, to watch and discuss mature-minded movies together in a controlled setting, before they're out on their own."
—**Movie Nights**

You can request this resource by contacting Focus on the Family at 800-232-6459 (in Canada, 800-661-9800).