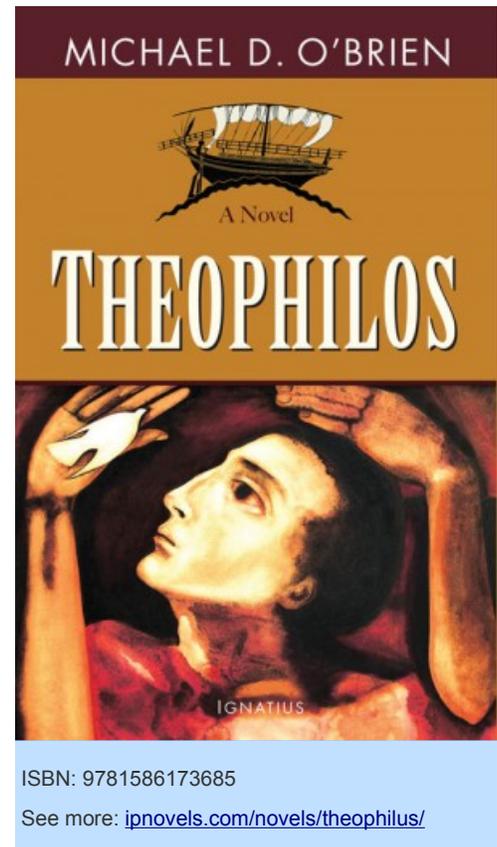


Discussion Questions for *Theophilus*

St. Luke addresses his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles to a person named Theophilus. We know nothing about the man, other than that Luke respected him highly, addressing him as “most excellent Theophilus.”

In Michael D. O’Brien’s fictional reflection on who the man may have been, Theophilus is presented as the uncle and adoptive father of Luke. He is a Greek physician living on the island of Crete, about 30 years after the death of Christ.

1. What kind of man is Theophilus in terms of his moral character?
2. He is principled and idealistic, but on what foundations are these qualities built?
3. What is his attitude to the new religion of Christianity?
4. What is his attitude towards all religions?
5. One might call Theophilus an early secular humanist or an agnostic, though he is not a moral relativist. Discuss the distinction between these two attitudes towards life (agnosticism , moral relativism).
6. A man of science, he doubts what he cannot see or measure with his own eyes, but as a philosopher he is willing to consider metaphysical realities. Where are the boundaries of his thought?
7. He has suffered many losses in his life, especially the deaths of family members. How has this affected him?
8. What factors contribute to his decision to visit Judea? Why does Theophilus feel such urgency in undertaking the voyage, which in the first century A.D. would be a long and difficult one?
9. He meets and records in his journal his meetings with many different kinds of people in Judea, some who believe in Christ and some who do not. Describe the various worldviews of the people in:
 - Galilee (Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum)
 - Jerusalem (believers, saints, a Pharisee, a Zealot, a patriot, a philosopher, a prophet)
 - Caesarea (believers, saints)
10. Discuss the ways in which Luke tries to communicate to Theophilus the reality of the Good News of Christ’s redemption of mankind.
11. What are Theophilus’ blind spots? At what point in the story does his intelligent mind refuse to consider the implications of what he is learning about Christ?
12. Is this rational on his part, or is it irrational?



13. On his return voyage to Crete, Theophilus falls ill and experiences powerful dreams about Christ's life. On waking, he wonders if they are purely imaginative or if they symbolically contain some truths. He puts the question aside, unresolved. Why does Theophilus refuse to consider these as inspirations sent by God to try to reach him on another level?
14. What experience eventually cracks Theophilus' resistance to grace?
15. At the end of the novel, Theophilus understands himself better, sees at last what had blocked his ability to accept the Truth. Why does Christ appear to him as a child?
16. How does pride keep us from trusting?
17. How does humility help us to see things as they are, in our own lives and in the world around us?
18. What is genuine humility?