

About the Artist: Philip Bannister

For each of the volumes of the People of God series, Liturgical Press has commissioned an original cover portrait of the subject. These are created by the British artist Philip Bannister. Due to the enthusiastic response we have had to these covers, we offer here a brief Q&A with Philip about his work in general and on these portraits in particular.

Tell us about yourself, Philip.

I was born and grew up in the West Riding of Yorkshire, England, which was by turns a heavily industrial and wildly beautiful place of becks and silent moors, dales and fells. Work brought me southwards and I became a freelance illustrator in 1986. I'm lucky to now live by Bredon Hill in Worcestershire, yet another place of magic.

When we approached you about doing the portraits for the covers of the series, you responded with particular interest and even enthusiasm about the idea. Why was that?

I was particularly interested to create portraits of people who were authentically courageous by their nature, but who also may have felt themselves to be flawed in some way and adrift in the world—which seems to be the opposite of our present celebrity culture.

Can you describe your creation process for these portraits?

There is a limited amount of photographic reference for many of the faces in this series, and these are often self-conscious

studio or snap shots. So I try to gain a little understanding of each subject and use some elements from a few images to hopefully give as honest a representation as I can.

For these portraits I use a non-watercolor paper! It is a coated shiny paper and almost repulses the color, which has to be worked quickly and confidently. I like to try to attain a spontaneous look and this method is, I hope, an aid to that!

Tell us about your work, apart from this series.

My work is varied, and I am (at least) historically literate, I think, so I'm always comfortable in the past! And whether I'm illustrating classic novels, architecture, children's stories, or making portraits, my approach is also (almost) entirely traditional. I work with watercolor, pencil, and pen, using my computer to scan and send the work but not as a creative tool.

Has any of your previous work been related to religious themes or people in the past?

None of my previous work has had an overtly religious theme . . . but, when faced with a clean white sheet of paper, I would find it difficult to begin a creative enterprise without having some still and secret pool to sail my thoughts across.