The difficulties involved in artistically rendering the incidents of the lives of the saints and Christ as they actually happened have concerned Western European artists and theologians throughout the ages. The attempts accurately to portray the historia, and also the efforts to avoid any misrepresentation of these crucial events in salvation history, are both integral parts of the artistic and theological debates surrounding religious images. Within the Orbita probitatis ad Christi imitatiōnem\(^1\) of Jan David, an appendix to his very popular emblem-book, the Christeliicken Waerseggher or Veridicus Christianus, first printed in Antwerp in 1606 – as a sort of illustrated manual for the imitatio Christi – the difficulties of representing these events are graphically elucidated [Fig. 1]: on a hill Christ is shown bearing his cross. Ten artists sit at their easels painting after Christ their model: the scene resembles a painting academy, within which it is every painter’s task to portray the cross-bearer realistically. Only one succeeds at fulfilling this task, whereas the others paint scenes from Christ’s childhood or his life of ministry before the Passion, such as the entry into Jerusalem. On some easels, even the devil is depicted. The imminent danger of distorting holy events is made obvious in this seventeenth-century example. The book had grown out of Jan David’s experience as a catechist and was devised to instruct young readers in the fundamentals of Catholic doctrine, as well as to exercise them in virtue and the fight against heresy. The proemium explains that even the most talented painters have to work diligently to convey the true story of Christ.\(^2\) David acknowledges the necessity and difficulty of following the path

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\(^2\) See David, Veridicus 353: ‘Quem admodum praecellens aliquis pictor, omni sua industria ad vivum conatur exprimere, quod sibi ex arte imitandum praesumserit ita illa homini Christiano incumbit cura, ut Christum Salvatorem nostrum in vera sanctaque conversatione imitetur et in se ad vivum quasi delineatum exhibeat […]’.
Fig. 1. Theodoor Galle, engraved title-page to Jan David, *Orbita Probitatis ad Christi imitationem veridico Christiano subserviens* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1601). Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel.