And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him.

And opening his mouth, he taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake:

Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you.

(Matthew 5:1–12)

Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) has always been seen as the centerpiece or summation of his teaching. Particularly salient within the Sermon, standing at the beginning of it, are the Beatitudes, which are numbered variously, but usually seven or, in the early modern period especially, eight. They appear in extenso only in Matthew; a briefer, variant version with complementary Woes is in Luke 6:20–26, in the Sermon on

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1 The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Translated from the Latin Vulgate Diligently Compared with the Original Greek and First Published by the English College at Rheims, A.D. 1582 (Baltimore: 1899; reprint ed., Rockford, Ill.: 1971) 7. The Vulgate follows a slightly different order than that favored by the Greek Fathers, as well as Calvin and other Reformers, with the second and third Beatitudes – those who mourn and the meek – reversed.

the Plain. The exegetical tradition of both the Sermon on the Mount as a whole and the Beatitudes in particular is a long, deep, and wide river, with particularly influential commentary by Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Nicholas of Lyra and the Glossa ordinaria, and Thomas Aquinas, followed by the Reformers and a useful compilation on the Catholic side in this period from the Jesuit Cornelius a Lapide. Yet there is no comparably extensive visual tradition: before the early modern period, the Beatitudes took various forms, but were most often represented as women holding scrolls. Nonetheless, in the second half of the sixteenth century and early in the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, the Beatitudes were illustrated several times and in remarkably different ways, to such an extent that they provide fertile ground for a partial taxonomy of modes of depiction in scriptural illustration. I shall proceed from the more concrete of modes – narrative and exemplificatory – toward the more abstract – figurative, hieroglyphic, and verbal, moving from allegoria in factis to allegoria in verbis and tracing a progressive Entbildung of the representation, as it were.

My concern here is more structural than iconographical or historical. All these works comprise both image and text, and I am interested in how these ‘iconotexts’ work, how their various parts relate to each other ‘intermedially’, and how they signify. The Beatitudes provide a rich but

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5 For an introduction to iconotexts and intermediality, see Wagner P., “Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality – the State(s) of the Art(s)”, in Wagner P. (ed.),