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**The Indirect Comparative Method
An Attempt at Trying to Find a Path between the Scylla of Iconography and
the Charybdis of the History of Religious Mentality**

The indirect comparative method allows us to determine the similarities between literary sources and the realm of the fine arts. The subject of the research is sacred art dating from the late 16th to the 18th century. In our research, devotional literature only plays an ancillary part compared to paintings and engravings. But it is this very literature that widens our perspective and enables us to arrive at conclusions. The character of sacred art largely determines the literary sources to which we refer. These consist primarily of collections of sermons, prayers, sacred songs, fraternal orders' textbooks and books of a theologico-devotional nature.

The principles underlying this type of research must take into account the specificity of the area of art that is being researched. Several trends have been followed with respect to the development of iconography of Polish religious art. The typology of pictures being created in the 17th and 18th centuries was taken from patterns that drew on foreign art, mostly Flemish, North Netherlandish and German, as well as Italian and French.

An interesting issue is the role of prints in the study of the content of Polish works of art. This role is rather varied and we can distinguish five basic patterns which, to varying degrees, allow us to trace the ideological relationships that exist between content as expressed by a foreign pattern and by the Polish examples referring to it. By allowing us to become better acquainted with the process of how a work of art comes into being, a foreign print is often evidence of creative thinking both on the part of the artists as well as the founders.

The same principle must also apply when gathering auxiliary literary materials.

A low level of artistic skill shown in the examples that are analyzed also justifies the adopted method of research. Works that appear as part of one theme, and that are alike, consist of a collection of several compositional variants which are repeated with only minor changes. These result, in some measure, from a state of general awareness. Which is why, in such case, it is possible to make use of the indirect comparative method.

The results of the research undertaken to date, allow us to confirm that the research method adopted has enabled us, to a large extent, to enrich the interpretations of the subjects that have been studied. It has proved particularly helpful for works encompassing a broader field of research such as the vision of purgatory or representations of the struggle between good and evil in Polish religious art and literature of the Baroque period. It is also ideally suited for studies in iconography and iconology covering a narrower range of topics: (such as, for example, the Prophet Elijah, Sybil, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of the Rosary, and the depiction of *Iudicium Sanguinarium* or selected saints).