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Martha J. Egan, Relicarios: The Forgotten Jewels of Latin America

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Guardian of the Book of Common Prayer The Episcopal Church

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Martha J. Egan. *Relicarios: The Forgotten Jewels of Latin America*. Albuquerque: SF Design/Fresco Books, 2020. Distributed to the trade by University of New Mexico Press. 276pp. \$75 Hardcover. ISBN 978-1934491744.

At a time when Latin American theology is increasingly being discovered by mainstream Christian denominations, Martha Egan's *Relicarios* reminds us that theology is a matter of much more than ideas. It can be material.

Egan's is the definitive study of *relicarios*, the lockets or jewelry worn for centuries by thousands of Latin American women and men. The book is a treasure chest of beautiful professional photos and extensive research.

Painted or sculpted and encased in gold or silver, *relicarios* are devotional jewelry worn to elicit the blessing of a saint, to fulfill a vow, and sometimes even to show off, as sumptuary laws often limited what adornments could be worn by the not so rich.

Relicarios presents the *relicarios*'s variety, characteristics, and development, tracing their origins in Europe and further development all over Latin America, from New Spain (Mexico) to viceregal Peru and Bolivia and to the Caribbean. It follows their artistry down to this day, with the current techniques of Bolivian painters and jewelers. The book also includes a chapter on related other forms of adornment, from *Agnus Deis* (wax seals) to the badges of nuns, monks, and laity.

Relicarios is a graphic reminder that we cannot reflect theologically upon the veneration of saints, for example, without studying *how* this veneration took place or through what means—be they material objects, rites, or other practices. In *relicarios* the theological ideas and people's devotion become paint, gold, and silver. Egan's *Relicarios*

makes a precious contribution to the study of theology and popular religion as well as to Latin American studies and the study of material culture.

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