

Book gives a glimpse at church life in New Mexico in the 1930s

Mark Pattison | Aug. 26, 2009

GUITARS AND ADOBES

By Fray Angelico Chavez

Museum of New Mexico Press, \$24.95

Seventy-seven years after Fray Angelico Chavez's serialized novel, *Guitars and Adobes*, appeared in the pages of St. Anthony Messenger magazine, it is now out in book form.

It has been described as a kind of Hispanic answer to Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, her classic novel based on the real French archbishop charged by the pope with leading the church's fledgling vicariate in the Southwest.

Fray Angelico, a Franciscan priest, was still in the seminary when he wrote his novel -- in five distinct parts. St. Anthony Messenger couldn't devote that much space in five issues to the novel, so it serialized it in monthly installments in 1931 and '32.

The only Hispanic among a group of Midwestern lads studying for the priesthood in Cincinnati, young Manuel Chavez strove to reinforce his Hispanic identity both before and after his ordination to the priesthood in 1937. He ultimately served as the archivist for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, and gained a reputation for being one of New Mexico's foremost writers and intellectuals -- a reputation that has endured in the 73 years since his passing.

As archdiocesan archivist, he undertook the cataloging and translating of Spanish archives that allowed for a re-evaluation of the history of New Mexico and the region. Fray Angelico was also a member of the Santa Fe Writers Group that included such figures as D.H. Lawrence, Thornton Wilder, Alice Corbin, Witter Bynner and the aforementioned Cather.

Guitars and Adobes also contains 20 unpublished short stories by Fray Angelico. The book, published by the Museum of New Mexico Press, retails for \$24.95 and can be ordered through online booksellers.

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