Seeing God's Face: A review by Ivan Arthur, author of *Pavement Prayers* and *Saynt Lachmi*

From the title, you would expect this to be a book on spirituality and mysticism; of pious instruction; of prayer and the contemplative life; or perhaps some yogic method of transcendental meditation.

But *Seeing God's Face* turns out to be a happy cheat. It reads like a travelogue; an engaging and fascinating narrative of the author's journey to India, a country sprinkled with surprises; a people whose character, behaviour and lifestyle are different, to the point of being shocking; challenging credibility. It would be true to say that any travel to another country is always a heady mixture of fun, enlightenment, wonder and surprise. But Kiki Latimer's chronicle presents another dimension of that wonder and surprise. She looks with one eye at the sublime beauty of the Himalayas and the grandeur of India's ancient monuments and with the other eye, the impossible living conditions of a large number of people, living literally on the streets, a few inches away from fast moving traffic. "A collision of contrasts and contradiction," she calls it; "a mystical weaving" of cultures, religions, worldviews …. smells, flavours, sounds, colours and the ability to love and fear. She looks through this India with a third eye, bending her exclamations into question marks. What is hunger? What is poverty? What is wealth? Leading to the deeper question of What am I? A Catholic American. Wealthy in contrast with this visible poverty. But in the divine order of things, who is the poorer? Who nearer to God? Who the saint? Who the sinner? Who the sinned? Who the sinned against?

You begin to introspect with Kiki Latimer: I am a Catholic, you say with her. A Protestant. A Buddhist. A Muslim. A Sikh. A Hindu. But really, *Who* Am I. You are now not what you thought were. In embracing the rightness of India's wild contrasts, you become that sign of contradiction, like perhaps, a St. Francis of Assisi or St. John of the Cross. This journey begins to mirror that of St. John Paul II on his papal visit to India; who saw the country itself as that Sign of Contradiction; the very Cross itself, with its horizontal piece of pain and suffering joined to that vertical piece pointing to enlightenment and salvation. You dip yourself with Latimer into the sacred river of the Hindus, the Ganges, and while the thousands around her chant their Vedic prayers, you see her make the sign of the Cross, acknowledging the presence of the holy universal Trinity in that polluted water; in everything; embracing the unfamiliar and the alien into her own personal spiritual world.

Seeing God's Face then becomes a double cheat: travelogue as spiritual journey; a parallel theology that sits comfortably with your faith. Told in an easy, often humorous, almost racy narrative, the book is a rewarding read for both, the world traveller and the spiritual tourist.