

In her introduction, Bradley reveals the origin of her idea for such an anthology:

The idea for compiling *Mosaic* had its genesis in the London bombings on 7 July 2005. I was in London at the time, and this tragic event distressed me greatly. It made me feel powerless and vulnerable – especially as one of the suicide bombers lived on the same road as my twin brother – so I was determined to channel my concerns into something constructive and positive. Hence the birth of *Mosaic*.

The concept of a mosaic, where a whole design is composed of a combination of myriad elements, resonates with a vision I hope most Australians share: diverse people of many beliefs, faiths and backgrounds who are able to live peacefully together as one nation. My hope is that *Mosaic* will build bridges and assist in the ‘dialogue of living’ within Australia’s multicultural and spiritually diverse society.

The passages in the book, up to two pages in length, are arranged in alphabetical order of contributor. The format includes a short biographical note, the chosen passage, and the contributor’s reflection on his or her passage. These comments range from half a dozen words to a full-page mini-essay. Contributors include Elizabeth Murdoch, Phillip Aspinall, Muriel Porter, Frank Lowy, Tom Uren, Aziza Abdel-Halim, Tim Costello, Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton, Stephanie Dowrick, Tim Fischer, Gabi Hollows, Veronica Brady, Aden Ridgeway, James Strong, Jeff McMullen, Anthony Field, John Eales, Petrea King, Andrew Denton, Charmaine Solomon, Tim Winton, Peter Singer, Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio, Mike Munro and Peter Sculthorpe.

A common theme, shared by many contributors, is an optimism regarding the human spirit or human potential, together with a concern for social justice. The sources of the extracts appear at the end of each contribution, sometimes accompanied by potted biographical or historical information to aid in situating the passage. There is an index of contributors and an index of sources, and a website dedicated to the book at www.mosaicbook.com.au. The ‘links’ page on the website gives a good indication of the kind of interests and projects of which Bradley approves.

This is a useful anthology, not least because it features contributors who identify as Australians from beginning to end. For me, the Christian heritage of our nation, and the Christian traditions that have profoundly shaped so many of us, are clearly in evidence in the collection. Perhaps it is simply due to my cultural roots, but I perceive a certain depth, and an open-heartedness, in the Christian passages that is not matched by the Islamic and Asian writings published here. But that was not the editor’s intent: rather, the aim is to bring people together, seeking mutual respect and understanding, and seeking unity where it can be expressed in sincerity. And, of course, there are also contributors and passages reflecting no commitment to organized religion, such as the fine contribution by Peter Singer, who quotes from fellow animal rights campaigner Henry Spira, encouraging us all to “do the best one can to make this a better place for others.”

There is much food for thought here, as well as for personal challenge, inspiration and guidance in the large and small decisions of our lives. It’s not for me to second-guess why certain groups are better represented than others, or why only 165 of the more than 450 people invited to contribute actually did so. The final collection offers a rich spiritual and cultural resource at a critical time in world history. My main criticism is that the book, as I have it, will not open flat – but that is a minor problem when compared to the problems that prompted the editor to commence the project. And I am glad she has completed it. If these are among Australia’s best and brightest citizens, and this corpus is what serves to motivate and shape them, then we are in good hands.