

A Tale of Two Cities

How would you describe Melbourne? What are Melbourne's outstanding features? Are there things that make Melbourne unique? Melbourne is described in Wikipedia as: “a centre for the arts, commerce, education, entertainment, sport and tourism”. It is the birthplace of cultural institutions such as Australian film (as well as the feature film), Australian television, Australia rules football, the Australian impressionist art movement (known as the Heidelberg School) and Australian dance styles (including New Vogue and later, the Melbourne Shuffle). Melbourne is also the centre of contemporary and traditional Australian music. For these, it is known as the "cultural capital of Australia".

It has been ranked as one of the top three World's Most Livable Cities by the Economist Groups' Intelligence Unit (since 2002), top 10 Global University Cities by RMIT's Global University Cities Index (since 2006) and top 20 Global Innovation Cities by the 2thinknow® Global Innovation Agency (since 2007). The metropolis is also home to the world's largest network.

Melbourne is also home to a wide range of religious faiths. The largest of which is Christian (64%) with a large Catholic population (28.3%). However Melbourne and indeed Australia, are highly secularized, with the proportion of people identifying themselves as Christian declining from 96% in 1901 to 64% in 2006 and those who did not state their religion or declared no religion rising from 2% to over 30% over the same period. Melbourne has the largest Jewish population in Australia, approximately 60,000 and is home to the largest number of Holocaust survivors of any Australian city, indeed the highest per capita outside Israel itself. Melbourne is spiritually “poor, naked, blind, lukewarm.”

The city of Laodicea was renowned for a strong commercial trade in raven-black wool, its thriving agricultural base, garment industry and textile manufacture. There was a medical industry, based on the eye salves and Phrygian powders used in eye treatment. The banking and money exchange industry also thrived in the city. Laodicea sourced boiling hot water from the geothermal natural springs about seven kilometers away. By the time it arrived, it was only lukewarm and need to be reheated. Note the irony in the words John writes to the church: “you are poor, naked, blind, lukewarm” Revelation 3:14-22.

Epaphras began the church of Laodicea. In the 4th century, Apollinaris of Laodicea proposed the heretical theory Apollinarianism. Apollinaris taught that the two natures of Christ could not co-exist within one person. This heresy denies the true and complete humanity in the person of Jesus. Paul's letter to the church of Laodicea is lost [Colossians 2:1; 4:13-16]. A large earthquake destroyed Laodicea and it has never been rebuilt.

In the light of these seven letters in Revelation chapters 2-3, how would you describe the spiritual state of Canterbury Gardens Community Church? Of your family? Of yourself? If we are to be a vibrant “hot” church, it begins with you and me. Will we respond positively to that the Spirit is saying to us?