

Daniel Scot

Biography and details of the 'religious vilification' case

Life in Pakistan

Daniel Scot (53) is a Pakistani-national (now an Australian citizen) born in 1951 in the Punjab province in central Pakistan. Pakistanis do not have Western-type surnames. Daniel's father was Ahmed Siddiqui, so Daniel was known as Daniel walid ("son of") Ahmed Siddiqui throughout his childhood. He later chose the surname Scot for himself. He is married (to Mariat) with five adult children.

Daniel's parents were part of the small Christian minority in Muslim Pakistan. Following his education, Daniel wanted to become a lecturer in maths at the University of Punjab, but preference was given to Muslims. Daniel therefore made a point of studying Islam and its sacred texts with such diligence that he passed an examination in Islamic studies with a perfect score - 100% - ahead of all Muslim applicants. He got the job.

In 1986, the Pakistan Penal Code was amended (Section 298-C) to make the offence of insulting the Prophet Mohammed punishable by death. Shortly after this new law had been passed, the Punjab university authorities summoned Daniel Scot and pressured him to convert to Islam. He refused, saying Mohammed offers no assurance of salvation and that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

The very next day Daniel Scot went into hiding because it became known that he was to be formally charged with blasphemy. He faced death threats from students. Daniel hid in various places, sheltered by friends. Some months later he managed to leave Pakistan. Because of the capital charge against him, Daniel cannot return to his homeland.

Australia

In 1987 Daniel Scot arrived in Brisbane. He gained a position as lecturer in mathematics at the Queensland University of Technology, later joining the mathematics department at the University of Queensland.

In 1994, Daniel Scot was ordained as a pastor in the Assemblies of God church and his ministry is based at Northside Christian Church in Everton Park, Brisbane. He began holding seminars on Islam. His specialist knowledge of Islam's holy books led to many invitations to address church meetings, Bible colleges and other groups.

On 1 January 2002, a new law - the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act - came into effect in the Australian state of Victoria. It created the offence of religious vilification - inciting hatred against a person or group on the ground of their religious belief. The new law stated that intention was irrelevant (Section 9).

There was considerable community controversy when the new legislation was first mooted in 2000. The Victorian government received some 15,000 submissions opposing such a law. The final law was amended to include key exceptions for statements, discussion or debates made for any 'genuine religious purpose'. The intention of this amendment was to address the points raised by religious groups who said the law would harm freedom of speech.

On 9 March 2002, two months after the law came into force, Pastor Daniel Scot conducted one of his seminars on Islam at the invitation of Pastor Danny Nalliah, head of Catch the Fire Ministries in Melbourne. The seminar was held in a church, and over 200 Christians attended.

In addition, unknown to the conference organisers, three Muslim converts with European surnames attended the seminar at the urging of May Helou, a member of the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) who was seconded to work with the Equal Opportunities Commission of Victoria (EOCV). The three Muslim converts attended different parts of the seminar at different times, but none attended the introduction which put the parts in context. They took notes which formed the basis of a formal complaint to the EOCV by the ICV.

Much of the formal complaint related to statements by Pastor Scot which were direct translations from the Quran. The three complainants later admitted that their knowledge of the Quran was slight. They apparently had not recognised the verses.

The seminar was recorded on audiotape. The transcript shows that Pastor Scot told his audience several times that "Muslims are not the enemy. We must love Muslims." He said that most Muslims in Australia do not know what is in the Quran. They can recite some verses in Arabic, but they generally do not understand what these verses mean. He said most Muslims are peace-loving, kind, family-oriented people. He urged Christians to show love to Muslims and to befriend them by inviting them into their homes.

The ICV then took the case to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) where Judge Michael Higgins adjudicated. The hearing began in October 2003 and ended in June 2004. On 17 December 2004 he handed down his finding - that Pastor Daniel Scot and Pastor Danny Nalliah were guilty of vilifying Muslims.

On 22 June 2005 the judge handed down the penalty. The respondents must place a statement (drafted by the Muslim Council of Victoria) admitting they were wrong to criticise Islam in various Victorian newspapers. The cost of placing the advertisements would be \$70,000AUS. They are also banned from ever making any similar comments on Islam anywhere in Australia.

Daniel Scot has said that he cannot comply with the order because he does not believe he has done anything wrong. Nor is he willing to keep silent about the teachings of fundamentalist Islam. As such, Daniel faces a possible prison sentence for being in contempt of court. Daniel has said he is willing to go to prison if that is the price of remaining true to his faith.