

Editorial

VINDICATION IS NOT THE BUSINESS OF SCIENCE

Under an untoward turn of events in the last year, Pope Benedict XVI had to cancel his speech scheduled on 17 January 2008 at the Sapienza University in Rome. A group of scientists and others in Rome had staged a strong protest against the idea of Pope Benedict XVI visiting and delivering his speech at the Sapienza University (1, 2). The protestors referred to a comment made by Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) in his speech delivered at the same University on February 15, 1990; apparently, in the speech Cardinal Ratzinger had spoken in a pro-church tune on the issue of Galileo affair. The protestors were of the view that the same person could not be allowed to malign the university and its pro-science culture again. On the other hand, a large number of religious people opined that Cardinal Ratzinger had been wrongly interpreted by the group of scientists, and he in fact had not vilified Galileo in any way, rather he had quoted comments from renowned philosopher, Paul Feyerabend. Thus, arguments and cross arguments go on. Interested persons may browse the internet (3) to study and arrive at their own conclusion.

It is, however, quite possible that, in such cross fire, one misses a more significant point of consideration that is important for science and scientists. We believe that even if it is proved in a hypothetical abstract mission for finding absolute truth that Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) indeed said something what is anti-science (not only anti-Galileo) in 1990 or that matter anytime, he (or that matter anybody) cannot be gagged from delivering his speech in an academic edifice. Indeed, no academic institution survives without the freedom of expression.

The religion of science indeed teaches us to inculcate a culture of symbiosis with due philosophical tolerance, educated skepticism and honest spirit of exploration. The free mind in science allows for tinkering even if there is a probability of impasse, as long as there is some (however remote it may be) probability of accruing meaningful information and knowledge. In science, practice of heroism and schools, rearing of disciples on a specific line of thought and producing specific authorities is not acceptable. Yet, the history of science has witnessed repeatedly the errors of making heroes and schools, propagating power in the form of disciples and authorities. Also, often in the history of science, nexus between instituted science and other quarters of power blocks have caused blockade to the advancement of science. Thus, it is a tragic

observation that, "...a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it" (4). Essentially, the history of Galileo

affair exemplifies this view (3). Yet, scientists cannot stop listening to a point of view, albeit from a religious leader, on the pretext that he vilified science and scientists in the past. Vindication in any form is not the business of science.

REFERENCES

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4. Planck M (1949) *Scientific Autobiography, and Other Papers*. Philosophical Library, New York, pp. 33–34.