Solution to papal chemistry challenge

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The papal chemistry challenge sought to find a lesser-known connection between pontiffs and chemistry. In particular, we were given the clue “this element is Pope” [1]. In the absence of context, this clue might be rather obscure and ambiguous. However, for a good reason, the challenge delved into the systematic nomenclature for naming newly discovered or not yet discovered elements.

Recall that the symbol of an element in the IUPAC systematic nomenclature is formed by stringing the first letters of the corresponding numeral prefixes (0 = n, 1 = u, 2 = b, 3 = t, 4 = q, 5 = p, 6 = h, 7 = s, 8 = o, 9 = e). Because the symbol of the hypothetical chemical element with the atomic number 5859 is “Pope”, we can certainly say that “this element is Pope”.

Although impractical, many other interesting words could be formed from the symbols of hypothetical elements using IUPAC systematic nomenclature. To this end, several other world leaders have their element. For example, (President) Bush furnishes element 2176, the late (Benazir) Bhutto element 271338, and Queen (Elizabeth) element 41990. Such a playful approach to chemical nomenclature might perhaps inspire those who find nomenclature boring.

References

1. Meija J (2013) Anal Bioanal Chem 405:6897–6898

This article is the solution to the Analytical Challenge to be found at
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