

## WHAT SOME COLLEAGUES SAY OF EZEILO

We begin this article, which deals largely with what J. O. C. Ezeilo's colleagues have to say about his significant influence on Mathematics and impact upon lives as attested to by those that worked with him. Some comments from his colleagues are as presented below:

### NATIONAL PRESIDENT (PROF. M. O. OSILIKE)<sup>1</sup>

#### HE ENCOURAGED AND INSPIRED US

The news of the death of Emeritus Prof. J. O. C. Ezeilo (CON, FAS, KSC) on 4th January, 2013 was received with shock by the Council and members of the Nigerian Mathematical Society. In 1980, Emeritus Prof. Ezeilo along with a few other mathematicians in Nigeria, founded the Nigerian Mathematical Society and he was the pioneer Vice President. Between 1984 - 1991, he was the President of the Society and an Associate Editor of the Journal of the Nigerian Mathematical Society from the inception till his demise. He attended almost all the Society's annual conferences even when his health was failing. His presence at the Society's annual conferences, encouraged and inspired the entire membership of the Society.

As the Director of the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja, he supported the Society in no small way in the production and distribution of the Society's journal to many institutions and libraries worldwide. In 1998, the Society in recognition of his laudable achievements to the Mathematics family in Nigeria, awarded him a commemorative plaque for his "outstanding pioneering contributions to the advancement of Mathematics in Nigeria." In 2008, the Society, he was conferred a life member of the Nigerian Mathematical Society. He was to be conferred a Fellow of the Society in this year's annual conference and this will be done post-mortem.

On behalf of the staff of the Council and members of the Nigerian Mathematical Society, I send our condolences to the bereaved family and pray that his soul will have eternal rest in the Lord.

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**VICE - CHANCELLOR (PROF. BARTHO N. OKOLO)<sup>2</sup>**  
**PROFESSOR**

At the University of Nigeria, the tale is still being told of a former Vice-Chancellor who retained all his teaching responsibilities, including his favourite course Maths 101 - a first level introductory module in mathematics. The story also has it that the Vice-Chancellor was often seen walking freely along a particular path in the campus as part of a regular exercise regime. These acts, which demonstrated his passion for the subject of mathematics and a rather modest and simple disposition to life, endeared him to the university community and beyond.

The man being described was Professor James Okoye Chukwuka Ezeilo (CON, FAS, KSC), the first -class mathematician, who became the 5th Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nigeria from 1975 - 1978. Today, a different kind of tale is being told - that of his death and the accomplished life he lived. At the University of Nigeria, where he spent some of the most productive years of his life, there will be no end to these tales, as his memory will be kept alive for many years to come. It is, therefore, with a heavy heart, that the management, staff and students of the University of Nigeria, join the rest of the world in paying tribute to Professor Emeritus James Ezeilo, our staff, teacher, mentor, colleague and former Vice-Chancellor, a perfect gentleman, whose death was announced on 4th January, 2013.

JOC, as he was fondly called, joined the services of the University of Nigeria as a Professor of Mathematics in 1964, and rose to become the Vice - Chancellor of the University in 1975. However, his remarkable academic career began at the University of Ibadan, his Alma Mater, which he joined as a lecturer II in 1958, before rising to the rank of professor in 1964. On joining the services of the University of Nigeria, he was made the Chairman of Mathematics Department, and later the acting Vice-Chancellor, from November 1970 to April 1971. Three years later, on 1st October, 1975, he was appointed the 5th substantive Vice Chancellor of the University of Nigeria. He held this position until October, 1978 when he was transferred to Bayero University, Kano where he completed his tenure in 1979. While in this position, he was elected the Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors.

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In 1998, he was appointed the founding Director, of the National Mathematics Centre, Abuja - a position he held for six years until 1994. He retired from the services of the University of Nigeria in November 1990.

His era as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nigeria was characterized by an unflinching respect for the rules and regulations of the University. As a result, relative peace and tranquillity pervaded the campuses and the University recorded significant growth in various frontiers.

I have a personal admiration for Professor Ezeilo because I share his preference for befitting and purpose-built structures over the collegiate system of temporary and small structures. In recognition of his contribution to the development of the University, the faculty of Physical Sciences building, one of the biggest building in the University which was built during his tenure is currently named James Ezeilo Bulding.

Professor Ezeilo was educated at the Ibadan campus of the University of London from which he earned a B.Sc (first class) in Mathematics in 1953. B.Sc Advanced (Distinction) in 1954 and a Masters Degree (Distinction) in 1955. Thereafter, he proceeded to Cambridge University, England from where he earned a Doctorate degree in 1958.

As a renowned Mathematician, who attained international recognition, Professor Ezeilo was highly sought after as visiting scholar. He was a visiting lecturer and research associates of University of Michigan, USA in 1963, and a Benedict distinguished Visiting Professor of Mathematics at Carlton College, Minnesota USA in 1979. In 1980, he was also a visiting Professor of Mathematics at Howard University, Washington DC, USA.

Professor Emeritus JOC Ezeilo was credited with nearly 90 scientific publications in the chosen field of Mathematics and belonged to many academic bodies, some of which he led at various times. For example, he was the President of Mathematical Association of Nigeria (1972 -1974) and President of Nigerian Mathematical Society (1984 -1991). He was also Member, Mathematical Association of America; Member, London Mathematical Society; Member, Society of Industrial and Applied Mathematics; Fellow, Nigerian Academy of Sciences; Fellow, Third World Academy of Sciences; Fellow, African Academy of Sciences; Fellow, Mathematical Association of Nigeria.

Professor Ezeilo also had a long record of community and selfless service at the both the state and national levels. He was a Member, Nigerian Council for Science and Technology (1970- 1975); the founding Chairman of Projects Development Agency (PRODA) of the East Central State of Nigeria (1970 - 1974); Chairman, of the review panel for the mathematical curriculum for the Secondary Schools of the Federation (1978); Member, National Merit Award Committee (1979); Member, Board of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (1983 -1989); Member, University of Abuja Planning Panel (1983); Chairman, University of Abuja Planning Committee (1987).

Some of the positions he held were of a regional or international nature. For example, he was also the Representative of International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) Trieste, Italy for the West African Region (1990 -1997), Member of the Scientific Council of ICTP Trieste, Italy (1993 - 1997); Member of the Scientific Council of Institut de Mathematiques et de Sciences Physiques of Porto Novo, Benin Republic, Association of Nigeria and Member of the Scientific Council of Institut de Recherch'e Mathematiques, Abidjan.

In addition to regular accolades, Professor Ezeilo received various awards and recognitions for his enormous contribution to the development of the country. The icing on the cake was his decoration in 1979 with the national honour of the Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON). The other awards include Gold Medal of the National Mathematical Centre. Professor Emeritus of the University of Nigeria in 2006 and the Distinguished Professor Award by the National University Commission in 2010.

He was also the proud recipient of various honorary doctorate degrees, including D.Sc. (1989), University of Maiduguri; D.Tech. (1995) Federal University of Technology, Akure; D.Sc. (1996), University of Nigeria and D.Sc. (2008) Anambra State University.

By his death, the world of mathematics has lost a great scholar, while the country has lost a great administrator and leader. He will largely be remembered as a sociable gentleman and a good family man. At the University of Nigeria, he would be remembered as the great mathematician, a dedicated teacher, mentor and modest leader. For now we mourn one of our brightest stars, Professor

James Okoye Chukwukadibia Ezeilo. May his truly gentle soul rest in peace!

### **HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (PROF. F. I. OCHOR)<sup>3</sup>**

#### **A WORLD RENOWNED PROFESSOR**

The news of the death of Emeritus Prof. J. O. C. Ezeilo (CON, FAS, FTWAS, KSC) on 4th January, 2013 was received with shock by the staff of the Department, especially by those who passed through him as students and those who were his colleagues.

Emeritus Prof. Ezeilo joined the services of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1966 as a Professor of Mathematics. During the years 1967 - 1978 at the University of Nigeria, he was Head, Department of Mathematics; Acting Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor. It was during his tenure as Head of Department and Vice-Chancellor, that the Departments of Statistics and Computer Science were established in the University. He was instrumental to the building of the most magnificent academic block in the university - the Professor Ezeilo Building - which houses the Departments of Mathematics, Statistics as well as the Physics and Chemistry First Year laboratories. As a Professor in the Department, he worked relentlessly to establish the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja in 1988 and was its (Founding) Director.

Emeritus Prof. Ezeilo trained and mentored a number of postgraduate students within and outside the country, some of them are renowned Professors today. As a world renowned Professor, he has left indelible marks in the annals of the history of the Department. Even when he served as the Vice Chancellor, he still found time to teach his course in the Department for as many as four hours in a week.

On behalf of the staff of the Department of Mathematics, I send our condolences to the bereaved family and pray that his soul will have eternal rest in the Lord.

### **HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (PROF. Ray Okafor)<sup>4</sup>**

#### **A PLEASANT GENTLE MAN**

I met Professor J.O.C Ezeilo for the first time in the early eighties, in Nairobi, Kenya, during a Maths conference organized or sponsored by UNESCO.

[Let me reveal that having not attended University in Nigeria (my college was University of Dar-es-Salaam as an INTERAF scholar)

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I did not get to know Prof. Ezeilo before the Nairobi meeting]Of course long before this chance encounter with the erudite professor, I had read and heard quite a lot about him being a great mathematician of huge repute with massive international acclaim, and a former successful Vice-Chancellor. Meeting point in Nairobi was at our first breakfast at the hotel that hosted the conference. We were already seated at a table munching away when he walked in with absolutely no airs. He pumped every hand and settled down calmly. He was good company and his conversations were profoundly engaging. I was able to aggregate my overall impression of him sequel to the breakfast and subsequent encounters whilst the conference lasted. I came away with the perception of a man with affable persona and humanistic dispositions. He radiated warmth, and although he was of a huge frame, his personality did not intimidate. I hope my perceptions of him tallied with those of his students and others who knew him much better than I could ever have known him.

The last time I saw him was at the funeral of Professor Chike Obi in 2008. He had visibly aged, a bit feeble, but his charm and humanity were still intact. Although he has taken his exit to eternity, I am sure his legacies and our remembrances of him will live on.

### **PROF. M. O. OSILIKE<sup>5</sup>**

#### **A GREAT TEACHER**

I passed through great teachers at University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Notable among them was an academic iroko in Mathematics -Emeritus Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo, FAS, CON (now of blessed memory). He made invaluable contributions in the area of Differential Equations. Emeritus Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo was the founding father and the first Director of the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja. I must acknowledge that I have benefited immensely from the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja. I thank my great teacher, Emeritus Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo, FAS, CON and all those who worked with him in establishing the Centre for the wonderful dream. Emeritus Professor Ezeilo, a one time Vice Chancellor of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, represented a "generation" of African Mathematicians. He also served as the Vice Chancellor, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria and Chairman, Committee of Vice-Chancellors

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(of Nigerian Universities). Though he is dead, his contributions in Mathematics lives on. I must once again remind Department of Mathematics, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria to work closely with the Administration of the University to do everything possible to institute an Annual Lecture in Memory of Emeritus Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo. On the part of the Federal Government of Nigeria, in line with our National Anthem that "the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain", it will not be out of place to rename the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja, the J. O. C. Ezeilo Mathematical Centre, Abuja. The International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), Trieste, Italy was renamed The Abdus Salam ICTP, Trieste, Italy after the date of the great founding Director Professor Abdus Salam (a Nobel Laureate in Physics). I am not speaking just as a student of Emeritus Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo but as the current President of Nigerian Mathematical Society, I can say that the contributions of Emeritus Professor J. O. C. to the development Mathematics stand out as a "testimonial". Emeritus Professor J. O. C. Ezeilo was one of the founding fathers of the Nigerian Mathematical Society and served as the President of the Society for many years.

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**DR. A. A. MOGBADEMU<sup>6</sup>**

#### A REAL MENTOR

Over a decade ago, I was fortunate to be one of Prof J.O.C Ezeilo's students in a research oriented workshop for graduate students in Differential Equations. The programme was organised by the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja for about three - four weeks and his students Prof H. Tejumola (now late) and Prof A.U Afuwape were the other two resource persons that assisted him during the program.

During our weekly sessions I learned much about this remarkable man. He often spoke of his career and of the history of the mathematical centre. These are certain basic aspects of his conversations that I will never forget - Prof. Ezeilo's love of mathematics and

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his joy at the success of others, his gentleness and personal humility, his abhorrence of pretence in any form, his pride in the centre and conviction to uphold its standards. Most of all, he absolutely never gave praise. He was so generous to print all his published papers (All top rated) for me, to aid my research work under Prof. Afuwape's supervision when i was in OAU, Ile-Ife. Because of his humility and personal distaste for self-promotion, mathematicians whose work does not involve the study of Qualitative properties are often unaware of his several contributions to Differential Equations.

The admiration of the mathematical community for Prof. Ezeilo was universal or total. His mathematics and unwavering behaviour have inspired all of us to make our contributions to mathematics. He has shown us how to conduct our relationships with our own students. Although we all miss him badly but if we follow his style of leadership and mentoring his spirit will never die.