

BOOK REVIEW

Reviewer: Michael Ufok Udoekpo, PhD

Title: *The Triangle of Love*

Sub Title: *Life Reflections*

Author: Engr. Professor Anthony Ndubueze Nzeako

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I. Preamble.

Today marks an important milestone in the history of Nigerian academics and indeed the global academic community as we gather around Engr. Professor Anthony Ndubueze Nzeako, an accomplished Electronic Engineer, an Educationist, a global Scholar, a devout Catholic, a caring husband, father, grandfather, a prolific writer, a healthy, and handsome-looking octogenarian, in facts, who looks younger than his age, with a baby face, at the age 84 Years Old. Happy Birthday Prof!

This day will certainly be recorded in the annals of the history of Veritas University, Abuja, as the day a founding Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, from a remote village of Umuezeocha, of Ibo land, publicly shared and presented his well-written autobiography, or memoir, or still, Nzeako's "text book of life." In it, Nzeako brilliantly elucidates and re-creates the stories of his 30 years of investment in education and self-development (1946-1976). He also narrates his 46 years of life experiences, characterized with total submission to the will God, and rigorous responses to academic career that successfully spans federal, states and private universities, both within and outside Nigeria. The author owes every success to the Glory of God.

II. Title and General Layout of the Book

The title of the book was born out of the author's belief in God's providence that governs the phenomenon of the triangle of anything that exists, evolves, develops and grows successfully in life. In his own case, he identifies three triangular phases. First, his overriding desire (ambition) for education, learning and knowledge up to the university level, for services to God and humanity. Second, his untiring efforts, hard work, resilience, indefatigable struggles made at every stage in pursuit of his desire for knowledge in service of the common good, and thirdly, the grace of God and his plans for him, in spite, of his weaknesses, bumps, challenges, distractions, disappointments and difficulties he has faced in life (p. xi). Reflecting on his humble beginnings and how he was raised and brought up in love, the author came up with his title, *The Triangle of Love: Life Reflections*". The title is borrowed from the phenomenon of fire, known as "the Triangle of Fire." Nzeako believes that, just as there are three things; ignition, fuel and air (IFA), needed for fire to start, life's success requires desire, efforts and God's Grace (p. ix). Nothing exist in a vacuum, including familial love, from which he was raised.

The book has thirteen well written chapters, enclosed with pages on dedication, acknowledgement, foreword, preface, introduction, and pages covering his epilogue, appendix, references and indexes. The author wisely dedicates his work to his late mother, Nwanyiocha Irogu-Nzeako. He expresses profound gratitude to God and everyone who

assists him on his triangular journeys of love. He adumbrates all this in his foreword. (pp.vi–xi). Nzenwa M. Ozurumba's "preface," affirms that Nzeako "was loved almost by everybody around him from his childhood days to adolescence ...because of his inherent attributes of obedience, discipline, and unreserved respect for his parents," hence the title, "*The Triangle of Love*" (pp. xii–xiii). Hon. Chief Emeka Nwosu's "introduction" among other things, vividly, describes the author's language in the book as "racy and elegant, such that it heavily whets the appetite of the reader"(p. xvii). With such remarks, Nwosu congratulates the author, "for putting his thoughts and experiences together in such an incisive book"(p.xix). In his "appendix" Nzeako generously and resourcefully attaches the 2018 "draft proposal of Umukabia Economic Summit, with the title, "Agenda for Sustainable Umukabia Development,"(pp.309–314). His "epilogue" follows the "appendix", where the author wisely concludes that whatever path one chooses (in life), what matters most is focus, determination and reliance on God's Grace (pp.304-308).

III. A Summary of Each of the Chapters

Ladies and Gentlemen, please, permit me at this point to attempt a chapter-by- chapter summary of Nzeako's elegant contributions, so as to give you a clear take-home, satisfactory and full-baked ideas of what this "text book of life" is all about.

In **Chapter 1**, "Early Life and Education" the author shares the stories of his early childhood and western education from primary school in Umukabia Methodist (now Central School), in 1946, to the prestigious Catholic Secondary school, Holy Family College (HOFACO), Oku Abak, in Akwa Ibom, in 1959. He later attended P&T Technical School, Oshidi, and the Federal Emergency Science School, Onikan, all in Lagos, between 1960 and 1963, when he left for further and university studies in the then Union of Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR). Nzeako owes his early and disciplined childhood upbringing to his hard-working mother, Nwanyiocha Irogu-Nzeako, mentioned earlier. The author's mother was a big trader in many commodities. She would travel widely to all the local markets, far and near, in the former Eastern Nigeria. She would reprimand the author verbally, flog or denial him meals, whenever he fails to carry out his assigned duties at home, including trekking miles to fetch water from the stream, or participate actively in family farm work (p.4). Nzeako's community spirit, witnessed today, developed among his childhood peers in Umukabia community, where they bonded together in chasing crabs, birds and practiced exchange of farm labor (p.7).

The author sincerely believes that he wouldn't have gone to primary school without the love of his half-brother, De Moses. De Moses was the one, who not only convinced his mother, but paid the initial six shillings (s6) to enroll him in infant two class at Methodist Central School, in January 1947. While in primary school, Nzeako not only maintained first or second position, all through, but, to the greater Glory of God, came out as the "best graduating pupils in the First School Leaving Examination in the sixth class" in 1953 (p.10). The author describes this in his book as "God's intervention."

He also saw his admission into the prestigious, Holy Family College (HOFACO)), Oku Abak, in 1955, through the help of his elder brother, Dee Cookey Nzeako, a bicycle repairer, with a meager income, who by then lived in Calabar with his family, as another God's intervention in his life. This divine intervention brought "jubilation to his family," because admission to HOFACO came after several unsuccessful attempt to enroll young

Nzeako in other Colleges in Calabar metropolitan area, such as, the famous St. Patrick's College, Ikot Ansa (p.16). While in HOFACO the author, narrates how he was baptized and converted to Catholic faith, and later appointed a General Senior Prefect in 1959, by Fr. Bredie, an Irish missionary, and Principal of the College.

As if all these God's interventions were not enough in his life, Fr. Conelly, another Irish priest, providentially, introduced him to basic engineering, sciences, mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology in the same College. Till today, Nzeako appreciates HOFACO as a center of discipline and character formation. He calls it " a fountain of knowledge and blessing to the students, as well as, a seat of glory and honour to God,"(p.17). After the author's secondary education, there were some uncertainties and challenges. Nzeako shares how this led him to take "interim working experiences" at P&T (Post and Telegraph) in Enugu and Lagos, as well as a served as a Science Teacher at Ibeme Community Grammar School in Mbano in 1963. God intervened again when he was in Mbano. He was suddenly re-invited back to Lagos for an interview for a Federal Government Scholarship to Study in Russia (p.31).

In **Chapter 2**, the author narrates his university education in Leningrad Polytechnic Institute in USSR and in the Catholic University of Nijmegen, in the Netherlands, where he obtained his post-graduate certificates and doctorate degrees. While in the Faculty of Automation and Telemecanics in Leningrad Polytechnic Institute, which was located in the second largest city in USSR, he experienced firsthand, the "taste of the Cold War," and the challenges of learning a foreign language, along-side other African students (p.39). The author discusses at length the system of course delivery in the Institute, as well as the culture of intensive class schedules, examination rigors, human factors, and irregular feeding that led to his developing a sickness known as gastritis (excess secretion of gastric acid in the stomach), particularly during the winter. This sickness lasted with him throughout his stay in USSR, from 1965-1969. Management of social interaction with indigenous students and lecturers in the Institute were additional challenges, according to the author. Foreign students, apart from those from other Communist countries, such as Cuba, Vietnam, China, etc., became subjects of jealousy, either because they were given higher students' stipend, and had opportunities to travel outside USSR during long holidays, or were going out with their beautiful Russian ladies and girls. Foreign students, were also for political reasons constraint to live with students and Russian citizens in the hostel, and no two foreign students were allowed to live together for security reasons (p.50).

Nzeako also believes his university experiences in the USSR would not be complete without stories of how he spent his long summer holidays, outside USSR, in western countries, including, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Britain. While doing summer jobs, in these countries he experienced discrimination and class stratification, especially in Frankfurt and Britain (p.57). Nzeako narrates how he proceeded to the Netherlands for his PhD, since he could not return to Nigeria in 1969 after his studies in the USSR, due to the Nigeria-Biafra Civil war.

From Russia he proceeded to the Netherlands in 1969. In the Netherlands, the author started out at a newly founded Technical University, Enschede Twente. Like Mandela's "Long Walk to Freedom," he finally, and after 30 years (1946-1976), defended his PhD

thesis on "The Hierarchical Behavior of Human Operator" in the Catholic University, Nijmegen, in March 1976, at the age of thirty-six-plus. The author, once again owes his journeys and education in the Netherlands to the greater Glory of God (p.68).

His Academic Career and Experiences in the Federal University, especially, the University of Nigeria, Nsuka, where he took up an appointment as Lecturer I, in the middle of March, 1976, till 2009, took center stage in **Chapter 3**. Mahatma dictum, "be the change you would like to see in the society" impels him to advocate for different changes, growth and development while he was in the UNN's department of Electrical/Electronic Engineering (EEE). The changes the author introduced to this department, includes, separating the EEE into two departments of Electrical Engineering (EE), and department of Electronic and Computer Engineering (ECE), in 1981, employing more qualified staff, organizing an international conference, tagged, "Developing Countries and the New Information Age" (DECONIA). In addition, the author made many other sacrifices and contributions to the department, as well as, to the entire university community, too numerous to mention here (p.91).

In **Chapter 4**, the author proceeds to discuss his "Academic Career and Experiences in the State University" in this case, at the Cross Rivers University of Technology (CRUTECH), where he served in various capacities as HOD of the department of Electrical/Electronic Engineering and later, the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering. His achievements while in CRUTECH include increase in number of PhD students, staffing the faculty with qualified Lecturers, COREN and NUC accreditation of programmes, PG programs up to PhD, provision of access road to the department. Granted there were minor challenges, as usual, while he was there, the author considers, "the value he added to both the lives of individuals and the development of the university, and the extension of friendly horizon and good relationship beyond habitual confines" (p.108), as his greatest achievements while he was in CRUTECH (States' University) from 2010- December 2015.

In **Chapter 5**, he narrates how he was invited in January 2016, to start work at Novena University, Ogume Delta State. He describes this as a single individual proprietary private university (SIP), where he did his best, until April 2019, when the Vice-Chancellor invited him to Veritas, where he continues to serve till date, as the founding Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, with work in progress (pp.109-117).

In **Chapter 6**, the author shares his experience in the University of Ghana, Lagon. It was during his services in the University of Ghana, Lagon, Accra between 2004 and 2008 that his long-standing illnesses were properly diagnosed and taken care of. One was the scourge of the spinal spondylosis which would have caused him total or partial paralysis, from neck downwards. Another, was the imminent death proposed by the deadly prostate cancer. The author interprets these healings during his Ghana academic tour, as testimonies and manifestations of the triangle of God's love for him and humanity as a whole (pp.118-128).

In **Chapter 7**, Prof. Nzeako describes his "Love and Family." He reiterates his childhood love from his family as well the "Russion Love" leading to his "secrete marriage" with his Russian girlfriend Ekatherina (p.139). The author proceeds to recount his three successive family lives, overseas and at home. First, was with a Dutch lady known as

Rose Mary Allen, the mother of his two children, Kwame, born in 1973 (named after a Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana) and Amilca born in 1977 (named after an African revolutionary leader in Angola). Second, was with his first African wife, Juliana whom she married from 1981-1992. They were blessed with a beautiful daughter, Nddi Amaka Nnennaya. Third, was with another beautiful, young African woman, Dorathy Chinelo and both of them are blessed with four children, two boys and two girls (p.155). Nzeako contends that his love and family stories, be it in Russia, in the Netherlands, or in Nigeria, were not without turbulence and challenges. God saw him through, and again, the more reason the choice of his title "Triangle of Love." He advises young men today, to "take note" and not to be blinded by the euphoria of the present to the reality of their background and their future (p.156).

In **Chapters 8 and 9**, the author contends that, had he concentrated on his academic career more seriously from the time he joined the UNN, Nsuka in March 1976, as lecturer one, he would have reached the peak of his career, as a professor, earlier than 2000, "when it was formally announced, but deemed effective from 1992, with all the lost fringe benefits, and appointments, opportunities, locally and internally"(p.158). Nzeako confesses that he was faced with so many distractions, including, deaths and family issues, politics and particularly "Abia State Movement," which he played a vital part, as narrated extensively in Chapter Nine (pp.157-183).

Chapters 10, "Community Service: The Long Walk to Peace," and **Chapter 11**, "Community Service: The Umukabia Economic Summit" both, seem to have been so dear to the author's heart. Drawing inspiration from the story of the legendary and iconic, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and "His Long Walk to Freedom," the author extensively narrates his "uneasy" involvement in promoting peace in his village of Umuezeocha and development in Umukabia community, as whole. He cites Chinua Achebe's book "*Trouble with Nigeria*", that sadly identifies "failure of leadership" as our number one problem in Nigeria (p.248). He sums up **Chapter 11**, emotionally with the following advice to readers:

"Dear reader, you can make (or start making) your own history by getting involved in anything you think can help to improve your own rural community. Caution! Oftentimes, the very people (and institutions) you are striving to improve their lot may not appreciate your efforts and contributions, particularly, if it is not in (cash and carry). But if that happens to you, do not be discouraged for you are not alone. Our Father in Heaven, who knows the secret and evaluates the heart of everybody, will increase and multiply your efforts and contributions to many folds in one form or the other" (p.257).

Nzeako considers Chapter **12**, "Life Bitter Experiences," as his most difficult Chapter to write. He wrote it in tears and broke down several times as he recollects several deaths, losses, avoidable tragedies, bitter paybacks, ingratitude, and abuses, particularly from close and distant, peoples, family members, community kindreds and institutions, including those he tried to help and invest-in for the past fifty-four (54) years (p.258). The author took consolation in scriptures, such as Isaiah 55, Matthew 13, and from the blameless and upright, biblical Job (Job 1:1). Citing world optimists like President John F. Kennedy, President Nelson Mandela, President Barack Obama, and the "I have a Dream" speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Nzeako concludes **Chapter 12**, with a

sense of hope and optimism. He says, " it is therefore my fervent prayer and hope that despite the present odds, my sacrifices and dreams of a better tomorrow, not only for my nuclear family and extended families, but also for Umukabia community and humanity at large, would come true sooner or later. To God be Glory!" (p.288).

In the final **Chapter 13**, captions, "Projections," the author magnifies his characters of optimism, patriotism, hope, and a dream of a better future for Nigeria, and the world at large. He draws his hopeful and optimistic explanation from the question a young man once asked during a workshop in Lagos, in the 2000s, whether there was anything like "good old days" in Nigeria.

In his response, and based on his wide-range life and global experiences, the author is convinced that, the time of the Cold War 1940–1980, might have been seen from a perspective of the " bad old days" in the world. But, in Africa, it was a time when many African countries had independence and produced great leaders such as Kwame Nkrume of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, to name but a few. On the world stage were also Ghandhi of India, J. F. Kennedy of USA, Nikita Khrushchev of USSR, Charles de Gaulle of France, to name but a few, who were embodiments of hope. For, Nzeako all hope is not lost. He believes that there is need for a reset, locally and internationally, with a clear sense of direction and purposeful leadership across Africa, in our institutions, good political option, peaceful revolution mingled with prayer for divine intervention (pp.289-303).

The octogenarian-author returns to pay gratitude to God, his parents and formators, in his "Epilogue. He is grateful to his colleagues in all the institutions he attended, and passed through. He once again, highlights the importance and significance of his choice of the title, "The Triangle of Love." He advises young people not to waste great opportunities ever provided for them either by their benefactors, parents, relations, institutions, governments, work places or employers. He calls on young people all over the world to develop themselves to maximum capacities in any direction of choice through formal and informal education. This includes training in apprenticeship or entrepreneurship schemes. Whatever path one chooses, what matters most, according to our experienced author, is focus, determination, hard work, resilience, integrity and God's intervention.

IV. Appraisal

There might have been few minor typos, such as "Effurum" instead of "Effurun" on page 77, or "Ikoronsa" instead of "Ikot Ansa" on page 14, but that is not the point of this excellent work. I am happy to be asked by Egnr. Prof. Anthony Ndubueze Nzeako to review his book, autobiography or memoir, *The Triangle of Love: Life Reflections*. A "memoir" as he alternatively describes his work, in Chapter 7, could be seen as a notification narrative in which the author shares his memories from specific time period or reflects upon a list of significant events and occurrences in his life. While an "autobiography" is a factual and historical account of one's entire life from the beginning to the end. Professor Nzeako's well written work is a combination of both genres. It deserves our wholehearted commendation. The foundation of this brilliantly written volume is not only the discipline upbringing author received from his parents, particularly, the mother, but the impact of Catholic Schools, especially Holy Family College (HOFACO), Oku Abak, where the author received baptism in 1953, and learned

the rudiments of engineering, sciences, and later appointed a senior prefect in 1959, under the watchful care of Rev. Fr. Bredie. For some of you who may not know, I was also, appointed an assistant senior prefect in the same college, in 1985, 26 years after the author of the *The Triangle Love*.

In his 13 Chapters, of *The Triangle of Love*, Nzeako has strongly and convincingly demonstrated that his humble beginnings, growth in scholarship, global experiences and international exposure contributed in shaping his brilliance, resilience, objective thinking and resolute focus. There is also an important lesson this octogenarian-author, Professor Anthony Ndubueze Nzeako wants the society to learn from his book. Isn't remarkable that an engineer, a social scientist, educated in Russia/USSR. and in the Netherlands, would write like the biblical psalmist, quoting scriptures, Isaiah, Matthew, Job and conscientiously ending every chapter with doxology, "To God be the Glory"! No doubts, the author exemplarily believes in divine providence and God's intervention. He believes in hard work, love and good character formation. He also exemplarily accepts his weakness. He is not afraid of other people's ideas, talents, brilliance and superior reasoning, irrespective of where that may be found.

Nzeako invites everyone to read his work and make judgment on his suggestions and shared experiences. He also questions the reality of true love, and invites young men and women to pay attention to that. May I, once again, congratulates Engr. Prof. Anthony Ndubueze Nzeako, for making his thoughts and universal experiences available to all in this book. It is a great legacy that will stand the test of time for generations to come. In fact, it is an invaluable treasure for every living soul. I strongly recommend that, this book be given a place in your shelves, homes, offices and classrooms, as well as in our public and private libraries.