

The
Extraordinary
Gentleman

A Handbook for Christian Men

SELORM AGBLEZE

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WARNING!!!

MANY MEN MAY BE TRANSFORMED BY THE TRUTHS IN THIS BOOK, BUT MEN WHO ARE AFRAID OF REFINEMENT TURN TO PRETENCE. THE ONLY TRUE TEST OF AN EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMAN IS SUSTAINABILITY OF CHARACTER.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

AMP - Amplified Bible version

KJV- King James Version

NET- The NET Bible

NIV- New International Version

NKJV- New King James Version

RSV- Revised Standard Version

Acknowledgement

I will love to acknowledge with an inexpressible gratitude,

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Jesus Christ, for the gift of his life through which I have light.

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Love you all !!!

DEDICATION

To the Glory of God.

And

To my late brother and “son-at-heart”, Alfred Kwaku Doe Agbleze, I long to see the gentleman you are in the arms of God.

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THE OPENING CHAPTER

Beloved Alfred,

The world unlike you knew it has changed revolutionarily. Man is no more what he used to be, thanks to the abundance of knowledge and technology. Sad to say however, Manhood is epidemically losing relevance even in the church. I therefore find it a duty to write to you this letter, especially now that you are at the gate of manhood, to explain to you what has gone wrong, and what can be done right. I am sure that the wisdom that surrounds and is in you at your new home has taught you all things. My purpose therefore is to tell you some things. A few things that lay heavy on my heart, the burden of which only a brother can share. If you ever need any of the words in this letter, it is to equip you to live the balanced and fulfilling life of a true Christian man.

You can read this letter through, quick and fast, like the story books we shared but this letter will better be understood if studied and backed with its biblical references. Do not haste to be done and after which forget these words of my heart. But do well to come back to this letter again and again and I am sure you will better appreciate, comprehend and criticize these words of wisdom. Be kind enough to share with your friends and all who need it, you might just not know the depth of kindness you are doing to the world around you. God bless you and joyful reading.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT

Value systems

Men throughout their growth and development are exposed to various circumstances that are either common to all men or somewhat peculiar to them. Their reactions to these circumstances are varied. However, these circumstances leave trails that tint the lens of their minds' eye. All men therefore, have tinted lenses through which their minds' eye sees the world around them. These lenses vary in thickness, colour and in the shades of countless colours available. In essence, men see the same things differently.

With this preamble I will like to introduce the subject of **value systems**.

All men have as if it were a complex, networked, well-coordinated and yet constantly evolving network of information, bred over their life span of learning and experiences of various kinds. They employ this network of information to interpret

other incoming information in order to determine the appropriate responds. This Well-coordinated network of information is what we will call a **mindset**. The judgment or understanding that a man has of a particular situation is therefore affected by his past learning and experiences. Additionally, because a man's learning and experiences change overtime, his mindset is also continually undergoing evolution and is constantly transformed into new structures. Therefore, a living and active man usually has varying degrees of change occurring to his mindset at various periods in his life.

When a man interprets incoming information (usually in form of a word or gesture) with his mindset, the interpreted information forms a picture that is seen by his mind's eye. This picture is what the man regards as the meaning of the information. The unique picture of a particular situation which is a result of a mindset's interpretation of events is what we will call a **perception**. As such, what a man perceives is the meaning of a word or gesture is a product of his mindset.

There is a part of the mindset that attaches a determined measure of importance to any incoming piece of information. This is the part of the mindset that we will call the **value system**. Therefore, though certain people may share a similar perception of a particular situation and as such react in a similar way to the situation, the gravity of their response depends on the weight or the value attached to the information by their value system. For example, two men may consider a particular offence of car snatching as a crime and therefore have a similar perception. However, the gravity of punishment they might recommend may differ because of the difference in weight or value that their value system attaches to the offence. The first man might suggest a 5-year jail sentence while the other might suggest a 10-year jail sentence with hard labour.

The differences in jail sentences proposed by the two men mean that though the two men in this instance believe that car snatching is a crime that has to be punished, they have different perceptions as to the severity with which the offence should be punished. It could be that the second man has been

robbed once or more and these experiences have tinted the lens through which he sees the whole situation. As such, his value system attaches more weight or severity to the car snatching offence.

Fig 1 attempts to illustrate the operation of the mindset and value system in a diagrammatic form.

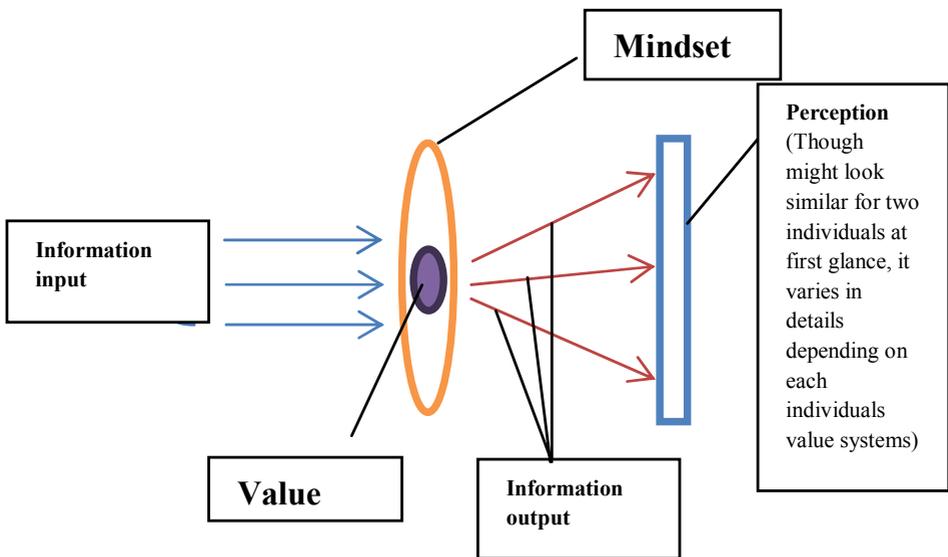


Fig 1: The Value System

The Crux of the Matter

As the spine is cardinal to the body, so is the value system cardinal to a man's personality. The Extraordinary Gentleman is a subject of personality, it is therefore important that anyone who desires an understanding of this concept should grab it by its spine!

The value system of a man determines what spurs him on and what brings him to a halt, what catches his attention and what turns his head in disgust, what wins his smile and what draws his tears. It determines his friends and his enemies, to what he puts his money and where he puts his faith; it is both his weakness and his strength.

The judgments passed by people about a man are also determined by the value systems of those passing the judgments and the value system of the man. That is, what the people value compared to what the man values. What people think, feel and say about you depends on their value systems and yours. If you value what they value you are of value to them otherwise you are not of value to them.

Additionally, what a man counts as important in life affects the decisions he makes and this determines the results he receives. Posterity's judgment will therefore be based on what a man thus valued and lived by. What a man values or attaches importance to, therefore throws on his image before God and men (Jer 2:5; Ps 115:7-8; Ps 106:19-10). The rule of the value system is therefore this;

What you value determines your value

Key quotation

Thus says the LORD: "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, **and went after worthlessness, and became worthless** (Jeremiah 2:5, RSV).

The Value System and Man

The value system of a man evolves with his experiences and learning and this is evident in his changing dispositions or personality. I am sure you might have encountered men who were wild and adventurous once and almost all of a sudden

became calm and collected. Something has changed in their value system either caused by an experience or by something they have learnt or both.

However, though this is true, nature has also left its prints in the lives of men at various stages of their lives where a particular value system structure seems to be most pronounced in a man's life. This therefore creates a level of predictability of a man's disposition at particular stages in his life. It is important to understand this embedded system so as to employ it to your benefit.

A great thinker, Balthasar Gracian, once wrote "At twenty, man is a Peacock, at thirty a Lion, at forty a Camel, at fifty a Serpent, at sixty a Dog, at seventy an Ape, at eighty nothing at all"¹. Let us

¹ Balthasar Gracian (1637), Oracle: A Manual on the Art of Discretion (also known as The Art of Worldly Wisdom), <http://way2goal.com/book/TheArtOfWorldlyWisdom.pdf> or <http://www.online-literature.com/gracian/art-worldly-wisdom/> or <http://www.online-literature.com/gracian/art-worldly-wisdom/>

examine these representations within the framework of value systems.

Twenty: The peacock

Twenty represents the stage during and just after puberty. At twenty, the man begins to value his newly acquired masculinity in thought, speech, looks and action. Therefore, his value system attaches more importance to information that promotes his perception of masculinity. He is ready to flaunt his masculinity at the least opportunity and does all in his power to make sure that it is visible enough to merit recognition especially by the opposite sex and his peers. In effect, any action or circumstance that threatens his display of masculinity is greeted with sharp signs of displeasure. He audibly displays this displeasure through his mostly newly acquired outspoken personality. Disobedience and pride are usual inclinations at this stage.

Thirty: The lion

Thirty represents the stage just after the storms of puberty have calmed down. At thirty, a man values

strength, pursuit and conquest. At this stage, he moves from displaying to deploying. He begins to use his masculine strength to pursue conquests or achievements. He is obsessed with results, he wants to prove his manhood; he wants to prove to himself that he is in control of the forest (i.e. he has what it takes). His self-opinion matters to him; he is his first audience and will do all it takes to please this all important audience. Risk taking and industry are common dispositions at this stage.

Forty: The camel

Forty represents the stage after a man has satisfied himself by proving to himself that he has what it takes. At forty, a man values his ability to solve problems. After proving to himself that he has what it takes, the man is ready to prove to others that he indeed has what it takes. He achieves this by taking up responsibility in the life, society and in business. He puts himself to work, finding solutions to other's problems. Like a camel, the man operates by tenacity and the capacity to prepare for the future. He aims at effectively combining his tenacity and capacity with a strong back to bear present burdens. Stability under heavy

responsibility and usefulness to society characterize this stage.

Fifty: The serpent

Fifty represents the stage just after learning from the mistakes of stage thirty and forty. At fifty, a man values wisdom. Wisdom is of three kinds, divine (Jas 3:17), earthly (1 Co 2:5) and devilish (Jas 3:15). The divine and the devilish are independent, yet, every piece of earthly wisdom is influenced at any moment in time by either divine wisdom or devilish wisdom. Therefore, earthly wisdom can be divine or devil inclined. A man at fifty begins to employ lessons from his experiences and learning more intensely, and begins to apply them in his dealings with the world around him. Deep thoughts become more important and the willingness to impart his philosophies of life is increased. Prudence or cunning becomes pronounced at this stage.

Sixty: The Dog

Sixty represents the stage at which the man has “seen it all and done it all”. At sixty, man values

the strength of his youth and the youthful desires that are now waning. Most pursue anything that makes them still feel young while others go out to renew tighter relations with friends of their youth. Yet still, others groom successors and delight in these in whom they see their youth and energy. Actualization or regret characterizes this stage.

Seventy: The ape

Seventy represents the stage that a man accepts and lives in the fulfillment of his actualization or the pains of his regret. At seventy, man values forty. He values seeing the prime of his personality and when he has the chance, he values advising other men about the way to keep the prime as long as possible. Man at this age is a shadow of his former personality. At this age man values peace and orderliness.

Eighty: The nothing

Eighty represents the fading periods of seventy. At eighty, man values beyond this life. Some think there is nothing beyond it while others admit eternity. At this stage, however, man is lost to all

that meant manhood to him. Much that makes him living depends on those around him. Many men do not see eighty; they are very much nothing by then.

The lesson therefore, is to know these stages, their strengths and weaknesses so as to control or avoid the common misfortunes that befall men at the various stages. This illustration is a Generic path for many men, but some, as in Robert Frost's poem, take the road less travelled and that makes all the difference.

The Extraordinary Path: The Road Less Travelled

The road less travelled is the road taken by great men. It is usually different for many individuals because it branches at many points. However, by a synthesis of knowledge, a Generic path can however be prescribed continuing from the earlier allusions to animal natures.

A man at twenty should be a parrot, at thirty, a lion with wolf instinct, at forty, a camel with serpent wisdom and from fifty, an eagle in the fullness of its majesty.

Twenty: The Parrot

At twenty, a man should value and nurture both his newly acquired masculinity and learning, but most importantly his learning. Though it is unwise to act mindlessly on what one has learnt as a parrot mindlessly repeats speech, it is double unwise to value brainless display masculinity. The parrot wears its adornment of brightly coloured feathers but is not blinded by folly to engage in vain displays like a peacock. It is appropriate at this stage to enrich oneself with knowledge. Knowledge in itself is invaluable and is the breath of prudent existence. An intelligent nurturing of your masculinity gives you the advantage of first impression; people are able to see your value even in your appearance.

Man is spirit, soul and body, as such, knowledge of any format that equips these three dimensions should be acquired for a complete development. At this stage a man's environment can have profound influence on his future personality. It is therefore wise for a man to control what surrounds him. These include most importantly people and information. Wise friends and counselors usually

called mentors are most appropriate for this age and beyond. A man at this age must do his best to consciously nurture a rich learning relationship with these people, teaching and being taught by them. But the latter (being taught) is more important especially when it comes to mentors.

There are three partners in the production of a human being; the Holy One (God), the father and the mother². Knowledge and blessings from these three must be adequately secured and protected, for their blessings are like bright petals and nectar that attract bees of good fortune. There are circumstances where your experience or knowledge will not help you, for when Solomon the wise observed, he saw under the sun that

*The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but that **time and chance** happeneth to them all (Eccl 9:11, KJV).*

² *Ancient Jewish Proverbs*, by Abraham Cohen, [1911], at sacred-texts.com

All men have twenty four hours in a day and bad times and good times are common to all men. But the blessings of God, your father and mother can turn chance in your favour and lengthen your seasons of happiness. Knowledge is acquired from these three through their instructions but blessings are acquired through offering them love and faithful service. Never despise the laying on of a father's hand.

Thirty: The Lion with wolf Instinct

At thirty, a man must value strength, pursuit and conquest, however, the manner of service he puts himself to, is of overriding importance. A man at this age must avoid corrupt or ill services. Services are chiefly of two kinds, your career (work) or your calling (purpose). Your purpose is the most prestigious of all services you can put yourself to. The knowledge for the three dimensions (spirit, soul and body) must be processed to produce a sense of purpose.

Purpose is a highly studied subject and many books worth reading are dedicated to it. It is wise to study the subject of purpose into detail. To put

the definition of purpose in Paul's words, purpose is the reason why Christ took hold of you (Php 3:12). Your purpose is a pursuit that drives you as you drive it and grants inexplicable satisfaction. Your career or work on the other is what you do for a living, that is, to generate income.

There are many that excel at various services or endeavours and yet are never satisfied. Even their success is a burden to them. Self-reflection and knowledge of the times is important to synthesize the appropriate endeavour. In the rendering of service, there are some whose purpose lies in their career (e.g. a teacher who raises God fearing scientists), others seem to have their career alongside the completion of their purpose (e.g. a banker who writes and sings spiritual songs) and others have their work embedded in their purpose (e.g. a full time pastor who is paid by the church). The purpose is sometimes reserved for latter parts of one's life. In a mean time, necessary and diligent preparation towards your purpose is essential.

The various undertakings that a man pursues at this stage are not devoid of risks, it takes the nose of a
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wolf to sniff out the traps that are set by man or the nature of the work. Skill to manage these risks is vital. Excellent choice and focus is necessary and yet when the game is large, it is wise to hunt in a group. Therefore, it is wise to surround oneself with wise friends at this stage. However at this stage, the friends you choose especially those close to you must be more specialized. They must have certain excellent qualities especially qualities you do not excel at yourself or are unable for certain reasons to employ. They must be friends that improve your effectiveness and efficiency in accomplishing your career and or calling. Patience is a precious jewel that must guide a man's choices and action at this stage.

Forty: The Camel with Serpent Wisdom

At forty, a man must value wisdom. Responsibility to society is attracted to this stage, therefore, a fortified spirit is as important as a strong back in solving problems. When troubles come and disaster strikes, a man loses his strength and will, but a strong spirit can sustain him (Pr 18:14)

There is a straw that breaks a camel's back, wisdom is needed to avoid those additional straws. A man must help when he can and must do it out of a pure heart, but it is vexation to the soul to make everybody's emergency your emergency. Judgment and discernment are important, some people are either just lazy or out there to use others for their selfish ends.

Many at this stage belong to society so much that they no longer belong to themselves, others belong so much to themselves that they have no independence, for their whims ride them. None of these extremes is prudent. Wisdom is principal; strength is continuously going out of fashion and information is becoming excessively common yet wisdom is eternal.

Fifty: The Eagle

From fifty, a man must value mastery and majesty in his deployment of wisdom in all affairs of life, state and divinity. However, this must not be done in ostentation, but in the moderation of grace. Grace in endeavours of humanity and divinity eliminates blemishes. It adorns perfection in the art

of life³ and offers salvation in the afterlife (Tit 2:11). In simple terms, grace (elegance) in the way a man does things makes life a beauty. Therefore, a man must do each task with a touch of mastery and majesty. Completing each worthy task and completing it with excellence. In Christianity, it takes grace to be saved for grace takes away our sins and decorates us with the righteousness of God himself (2Co 5:21). As such, grace is important in the affairs of humanity and divinity.

Like the eagle, a man from fifty must soar above the winds of life maintaining the divine gift of astute discernment, and the rare art of recreating himself in spirit, soul and body. Recreating himself keeps relevant in changing times. Therefore know the times and what must be done then you will be the leader of many (1Ch 12:32). Never cease to learn, whether in issues of humanity or divinity, but be more selective in what you learn and what

³ Balthasar Gracian (1637), Oracle: A Manual on the Art of Discretion (also known as The Art of Worldly Wisdom), <http://way2goal.com/book/TheArtOfWorldlyWisdom.pdf> or <http://www.online-literature.com/gracian/art-worldly-wisdom/>
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you apply. Learning keeps you abreast with time and truth especially in spiritual growth. Learning therefore keeps you relevant to the present generation and that to come.

As with all eminence, a man from fifty must avoid the enemy of pride, for pride is the stumbling block at the peak of the success over which a man trips into oblivion. It is also a matter of duty to nurture men of same kind that will excel in their chosen fields. The final act is to take off majestically into eternity.

The Jesuit⁴ priest, Gracian, once wrote; “for a noble life, spend the first act in conversation with the dead: we are born to know and to know ourselves, and true books make us truly men. Spend the second act with the living: seeing and noticing all that is good in the world. Not all things are found in one region. In distributing the dowry, the universal Father sometimes gave wealth to his

⁴ Member of society of Jesus
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ugliest daughter. The third act belongs entirely to you: to philosophize is the highest delight of all⁵ .

I will therefore like to present to you three stages that make up the life of a true man; **learning** (twenty), **living** (thirty and forty) and **leaving** (both depositing and departing, from fifty). These stages however in practice are interwoven, sometimes it may be demanded that you engage in the three at the same time.

*Insight 1: Great Men Die Empty*⁶

And as a man was being buried, lo, a marauding band was seen and the man was cast into the grave of Elisha; and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood on his feet.

[2Ki 13:2, RSV]

⁵ Balthasar Gracian (1637), Oracle: A Manual on the Art of Discretion (also known as The Art of Worldly Wisdom),
<http://way2goal.com/book/TheArtOfWorldlyWisdom.pdf> or <http://www.online-literature.com/gracian/art-worldly-wisdom/> .

⁶ I first posted this *Insight* as an article on my blog :
cxgentlemen.wordpress.com

When great men die without passing all they had to God, man and society, they then die with ‘power in their bones’. If no rare accident like the one in the above passage happens, then their gifts will join the great pool of potentials that fertilize the grave yards.

*True lives of Extraordinary Gentlemen are made of three stages, **learning, living** and **leaving**.*

Learning- a man must know and understand all that is around him, through formal and informal education and acquire information in all available formats. He must consciously cultivate learning through conversation with family, friends, mentors, society and God. However, what he learns from these agents is most important. Man is spirit, soul and body and knowledge needed for maturing in these three dimensions must be acquired and nurtured. A man must also, through this learning, identify and nurture his fields of interest, his talents but most importantly his purpose.

Living- a man at this stage must live by what he has learnt, practicing and experiencing the totality

of life, failing, passing, excelling and repeating these in different endeavours. He must distil his learning into industry and profession and become more responsible to family, friends, mentors, society and God. The pursuit of his purpose must be paramount.

Leaving- this is composed of depositing and departing. A Man owes it to God, man and society to lead other men to excellence in their chosen fields, identified talents and their purpose. He must not mold them into the likeness of himself alone, but must ensure they become better than what or who he is, and into the image of Christ as the Ultimate Gentleman. He must pour out himself on earth within the limits permitted by God and then take off into eternity with the majesty of an eagle. But he must leave emptied of all things that can only on earth be done so as to be filled with the fullness of the glory of God Himself that is prepared for him.

*Insight 2: The Animal Natures Used In the Illustrations*⁷

Peacock: A bird known for its male's extravagant eye-spotted tail. It usually spreads out its decorated tail in display to attract the female for mating.

Lion: A large carnivorous cat known for its strength and skill at hunting prey. They usually hunt in a group and are commonly depicted as “kings of the jungle”.

Camel: The camel thrives in harsh desert conditions. It is a usual mode of transport in the desert, carrying both humans and goods. A camel has several adaptations that permit it to thrive under difficult conditions and these include a hump for storing fat which can be converted to energy when metabolized, flat hoofs to prevent sinking into desert sand, sealable nostrils against inhaling desert sand and other adaptations that reduce water loss drastically. It is also a source of milk and meat and therefore very useful to society.

Serpent: Snakes are known for their ability to injure through their venom and heal through their herbal knowledge. They can also easily sneak

⁷ Sources: en.wikipedia.org &
<http://www.prophetic.net/eagles.htm>
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away from trouble but stand their ground to resist attack.

Dog: Dogs have outstanding social intelligence and are known for their loyalty. They exhibit playfulness and older domestic dogs also seem to freely interact with younger ones. They are commonly tagged as “man’s best friend”.

Ape: Apes are tailless primates with a humanlike appearance but do not have the complete set of abilities that humans have.

Parrots: Many parrots are vividly coloured, and some are multi-coloured. They are among the most intelligent birds. Some species have the ability to imitate human voices. Most species are capable of using their feet to manipulate food and other objects with a high degree of dexterity, in a manner similar to a human using his hands. Learning in early life is important to all parrots, and in several species crèches are formed with several broods. The parrot’s environment at its stages of development affects its behavioral patterns.

Wolf: Wolves have great vision and a sharp and excellent sense of smell and so can detect and avoid traps and poisoned bait. Wolves are

notoriously difficult to hunt due to their elusiveness, their sharp senses, their high endurance in a chase and ability to quickly incapacitate and kill hunting dogs.

Eagle: Eagles are large, powerfully built birds of prey, with a heavy head and beak and extremely keen eyesight for hunting. Eagles do not flap their wings most of the time to fly. They prefer to soar by using thermal currents of air. These warm air patterns are created by the surrounding terrain. They will spread their wings and their tail feathers and let the wind carry them to new heights, and then glide down to catch another upward thermal. Soaring saves eagles energy because they do not have to flap their wings so often. They build their nests in tall trees or on high cliffs.

A Man at Dawn

A Man comes to a period within the development stages discussed earlier where he becomes aware of his personality. This occurs as if it were a light shining through the darkness of the night and gradually, like sunrise, revealing the complete figure of his being, one step at a time from his

head to the feet. This phenomenon occurs at different stages to different individuals and is triggered by various circumstances, either good or bad or sometimes both. I am not here, referring to spontaneous reactions to the directions of hormones especially at the gate that separates boyhood and manhood (adolescence), but a consciousness that prompts a desire in the man to take charge of his growth and development process. This phenomenon is what we will call the **Dawn of Manhood**.

The particular decisions that a man makes at the Dawn of Manhood are a reflection of the value system he has adopted. Many men before this time are exposed to different value systems in their many associations with family, friends and society and they adopt one or a combination of these consciously or unconsciously. When the choice is conscious, individual chooses the value system that permits them to be accepted by a particular group whose membership he desires. Thus the individual places emphasis on particular knowledge and experience sets which shape his value system. When the choice is unconscious,

then the individual's value system is shaped by knowledge and experiences that the individual exercised no control over. Value systems adopted are unique because they are made up of the unique experiences and inter-linkage of knowledge that the man has been exposed to. However, a careful observation of a man reveals a pattern that permits a level of predictability of his thought, speech and deed.

There are varied choices in terms of personality that a man can choose to pursue at the dawn of manhood. But the most desired is the gentleman. The definition of a gentleman varies in various respects especially with respect to different regions. Additionally, various books that have handled the subject of a gentleman usually choose a point of focus. Many of such books choose etiquette. Etiquette varies with culture, therefore, the fact that many of the books written on the subject of a gentleman are from men of close regional association may make their readers disciples of other cultures rather than a gentleman in all circumstances. To avoid this trap, I will like us to be clear in our mind as to who a gentleman

is. For the purpose of our discussion, we will consider a gentleman as a prince of life, a member of the nobles out of which life makes kings.