A theological and spiritual look at the original gifts of man and their restoration in Christ

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Introduction: A question that spans the ages

What have we lost with original sin? And what has been given back to us in Christ? These are questions many Christians have asked themselves, perhaps without finding clear answers. The Catholic tradition, in its millennial richness, has clearly distinguished three types of gifts given by God to man at creation: natural gifts, preternatural gifts, and supernatural gifts. This article will focus on the *preternatural gifts*—a fascinating and deeply instructive category—to show not only what Adam possessed before the Fall, but also how Christ, the new Adam, has come to restore everything.

1. What does “preternatural” mean?

The word *preternatural* comes from the Latin *praeter naturam*, which means “beyond nature,” but not reaching the *supernatural*. In other words, preternatural gifts are not owed to human nature, but neither are they exclusive to the beatific vision or divine life. They are additional gifts that God granted to man in the state of original innocence, before sin.

St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and other Fathers and Doctors of the Church spoke abundantly of these gifts, and the traditional Catechism has also taught them clearly.

The three most commonly recognized preternatural gifts are:

- **Bodily immortality**
- **Impassibility (absence of suffering)**
- **Integrity (perfect dominion of reason over the senses and passions)**

These gifts accompanied Adam and Eve in Paradise. They were not an essential part of human nature, but God, in His goodness, had granted them as adornment and aid. When they sinned, these gifts were lost. But the story does not end there.

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2. The preternatural gifts in Paradise

a) **Bodily immortality**

Adam was not destined to die. Death was not part of God's original plan for man. The Book of Wisdom states this clearly:

> *"God did not make death, nor does He rejoice in the destruction of the living" (Wis 1:13).*

Although the human body is corruptible by nature, God had sustained Adam in a state of immortality, preserving him from decay and death, as a sign of the harmony between God and man.

b) **Impassibility**

In his original state, Adam did not suffer. There was no illness, no physical or psychological pain. His body and soul were in perfect harmony. This does not mean Adam was like a numb statue, but rather that his being was so perfectly ordered toward God that evil could not affect him.

c) **Integrity**

This gift is perhaps the most significant for our current life. Adam enjoyed full dominion of reason over his passions. There was no inner disorder. His desire was upright, his will was aligned with reason, and reason in turn was completely oriented toward God. He was perfectly free, without internal struggles between good and evil. There was no concupiscence.

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3. The tragic loss: original sin

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they did not just break a commandment; they shattered a harmony. That inner harmony (integrity), harmony with creation (impassibility), and harmony with life (immortality) were broken.

St. Paul explains this tragedy with penetrating clarity:

> *"Through one man, sin entered the world, and through sin, death" (Rom 5:12).*

From that moment, man was subject to pain, illness, death, and above all, an inner war: disordered desire, the struggle between what I want to do and what I do not do (cf. Rom 7:15–24). Concupiscence became our inheritance.

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4. Christ, the new Adam: restoration and surpassing

The Good News of the Gospel is that God has not abandoned man. In Christ, the eternal Son made flesh, not only is sin forgiven, but a new creation begins. He is the *new Adam* who comes to restore what the first Adam lost.

> *"The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45).*

Jesus Christ not only saves but elevates. He not only restores but perfects. Through His life, Passion, death, and Resurrection, Christ gives back the lost gifts—though in a different way—and gives even more: participation in divine life through grace.

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5. How are the preternatural gifts recovered today?

Christ has conquered death, suffered in our place, and triumphed over sin. But how does this apply to our lives? Do we no longer die? No longer suffer? Do we no longer struggle with passions?

This is where divine pedagogy comes into play. In this life, we live in a state of "already but not yet." Christ has initiated restoration, and we participate in it progressively:

a) **Immortality restored in the resurrection**

Though we still die physically, death has been conquered:

> *"Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54).*

Our faith assures us that in the final resurrection, our bodies will be transformed and glorified. That will be the full recovery of immortality, no longer as a preternatural gift, but as a fruit of the Spirit in the redeemed.

b) **Impassibility in future glory**

The resurrected saints will no longer be able to suffer. Impassibility will be part of glorified bodies (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 999). In this life, however, suffering remains—but it has been redeemed: it can now be offered and has salvific meaning, as the Cross shows us.

c) **Integrity: a struggle, a grace**

Through grace, especially in the sacraments, God begins to restore in us the dominion of reason over the passions. It is not automatic or instantaneous, but it is real. The spiritual life is a path of sanctification, a "re-education of desire," as St. John Paul II would say.

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6. Practical applications for the Christian life

How does all this help us today? Far from being an abstract topic, the preternatural gifts touch the core of our spiritual life.

a) **Understanding our inner wound**

Knowing that we were created with gifts we now lack explains why we sometimes feel broken, divided within. Concupiscence, fear of death, pain… are not signs of personal failure but wounds of an ancestral fall. This gives us humility and understanding.

b) **Receiving grace as restorative medicine**

God has not left us alone. Through prayer, confession, the Eucharist, and the life of faith, we receive the grace that heals us. Restoration is real and concrete, though progressive. In each act of virtue, we are recovering something of Paradise.

c) **Eschatological hope**

Our faith is not only for this life. We hope for a new heaven and a new earth. Our bodies will rise again, we will be fully impassible, immortal, and whole—not by human merit, but by the power of God. This gives us hope even in the midst of suffering.

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7. Pastoral dimension: proclaiming hope, forming in grace

From a pastoral point of view, this theme has immense value. It helps us understand the mystery of man—his dignity and fragility. And it also highlights the centrality of Christ—not merely as an example but as a complete Savior. He restores us from within.

Pastoral agents, catechists, and priests can use this teaching to:

- Explain original sin in depth without falling into moralism.
- Teach the life of grace as a process of healing.
- Encourage trust in divine mercy.
- Inspire people to live the Christian life as a path of restoration.

Conclusion: from Eden to the heavenly Jerusalem

Adam lost what we still long for. But in Christ, we are no longer merely children of Adam—we are children of God. The preternatural gifts speak to us of what we were, but even more, of what we are called to be in fullness.

St. Irenaeus said: *"The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God."* Through Christ, that vision is possible. Through Him, what was lost is restored. Through Him, the closed Paradise is opened.

Let us live with hope, in grace, and with the certainty that if we walk with Christ, every wound

can be healed, every struggle redeemed, and every loss transformed into glory.

“And the One seated on the throne said: Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5).