

“*Summum Bonum*”
in the Zurich Reformation

Zwingli and Bullinger

Aurelio A. García

1. The Western Tradition

It was Cicero who originated the use of the term *summum bonum* in Latin, to translate the Greek idea of the good.¹ For Plato, the ultimate goal of knowledge is the supreme good, which attracts by *eros* the philosopher; it can only be reached by contemplation. Aristotle, as would be expected, sees it as the target of human activity.²

In the general Western Christian tradition, we should seek the origins of the use of the term *summum bonum* as a description of God in Augustine of Hippo. In particular his work *De bono*, which is a refutation of Manichaeism, uses the term centrally, as it constitutes a Neoplatonist-based refutation of the dualistic doctrine.

¹ Used for example in *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 1.26.

² Aristotle tends to deconstruct Plato’s notion of the highest good. He states in the Nicomachean Ethics (I.7): “Happiness, therefore, being found to be something final and self-sufficient, is the End at which all actions aim. To say however that the Supreme Good is happiness will probably appear a truism; we still require a more explicit account of what constitutes happiness.” What is translated here as the Supreme Good is simply τὸ ἄριστον. Elsewhere in arguing against Plato’s notion of an essence beyond the thing itself, he closely associates unity and goodness as substances which have no other substances or entities prior to them (cf. *Metaphysics* book 7, chapter 1).

Augustine begins the short work basing his deductive discussion on the description of God as *summum bonum*. He states:

“The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God, and consequently He is unchangeable good, hence truly eternal and truly immortal. All other good things are only from Him, not of Him. For what is of Him, is Himself. And consequently if He alone is unchangeable, all things that He has made, because He has made them out of nothing, are changeable. For He is so omnipotent, that even out of nothing, that is out of what is absolutely non-existent, He is able to make good things both great and small, both celestial and terrestrial, both spiritual and corporeal.”³

It is clear from the nature and purpose of the discussion that Augustine will concentrate on the ontological aspects of God: he will use the definition of God as supreme good as the basis of derivation of all things, as from the One, the source, in a Neo-Platonist fashion. But this does not mean a soteriological horizon is totally absent. God as source of all good is not responsible for evil, which comes out of free volition. Creation is good; the abuse of a creature is evil. God is capable of turning evil into good. The rest of the discussion leads into the refutation of Manichean errors in this brief treatise. However, the establishment of *summum bonum* as point of departure for the discussion certainly gave great prominence to the term.

³ The whole text runs: “Summum bonum, quo superius non est, Deus est; ac per hoc incommutabile bonum est, ideo vere aeternum et vere immortale. Caetera omnia bona non nisi ab illo sunt sed non de illo. De illo enim quod est, hoc quod ipse est; ab illo autem quae facta sunt, non sunt quod ipse. Ac per hoc, si solus ipse incommutabilis, omnia quae fecit, quia ex nihilo fecit, mutabilia sunt. Tam enim omnipotens est ut possit etiam de nihilo, id est ex eo quod omnino non est, bona facere, et magna et parva, et caelestia et terrena, et spiritalia et corporalia. Quia vero et iustus est, ei quod de se genuit, ea quae de nihilo fecit non aequavit. Quia ergo bona omnia, sive magna, sive parva, per quoslibet rerum gradus, non possunt esse nisi a Deo, omnis autem natura in quantum natura est, bonum est; omnis natura non potest esse nisi a summo et vero Deo: quia omnia etiam non summa bona, sed propinqua summo bono, et rursus omnia etiam novissima bona, quae longe sunt a summo bono, non possunt esse nisi ab ipso summo bono. Omnis ergo spiritus etiam mutabilis et omne corpus a Deo: et haec est omnis facta natura. Omnis quippe natura aut spiritus, aut corpus est. Spiritus incommutabilis Deus est. Spiritus mutabilis facta natura est sed corpore melior. Corpus autem spiritus non est, nisi cum ventus, quia nobis invisibilis est et tamen vis eius non parva sentitur, alio quodam modo spiritus dicitur.” *Augustine*, *De natura boni contra Manichaeos* (Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, vol 42, Paris 1865, col. 551). English translation by Albert H. Newman in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 4, Buffalo, NY 1887.

In his *Etymologies*, Isidore of Seville has a long list of the divine names, much of which is impacted by Platonist philosophy, but he fails to list *summum bonum*. However, Isidore does have a book, *De summo bono*, in which he discusses doctrine in general, having the supreme good as point of departure.⁴ Nonetheless, his brief discussion of the highest good runs along Augustine's lines and concerns, and ultimately fails to develop the theme as such, that is, how and why is God the supreme good. Neither is there, as far as I can see, a relating of the term *summum bonum* to the revelation of the divine name as "I am," in Isidore.

One of the most distinguished moments of this doctrine of Neoplatonist provenance occurs in Anselm of Canterbury. In his *Proslogion* Anselm turns the intellectual quest for the *summum bonum* into an ontological proof of God's existence: "God is whatever it is better to be than not to be; and he, as the only self-existent being, creates all things from nothing":

"What are you, then, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived? But what are you, except that which, as the highest of all beings, alone exists through itself, and creates all other things from nothing? For, whatever is not this is less than a thing which can be conceived of. But this cannot be conceived of you. What good, therefore, does the *supreme Good* lack, through which every good is? Therefore, you are just, truthful, blessed, and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is better to be just than not just; better to be blessed than not blessed."⁵

In the text book of theology for the Middle Ages, Petrus Lombardus' *Book of Sentences*, we find the term *summum bonum* used in reference to the Trinity, and as the goal of human desire, with a direct allusion to Augustine's writings.⁶

⁴ To mention an early modern edition: *De summo bono* lib. III: omni hominum generi quam utilissimi [...], Paris: Jean Roigny, 1538.

⁵ St. Anselm: *Proslogium*; *Monologium*; and *Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane, Chicago 1903.

⁶ *Petrus Lombardus*, *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor*, Tomus Primus, Liber I, Distinctio 1 (ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Paris 1841, col. 13): "Sed dicit aliquis: 'Frui est amore inhaerere alicui rei propter se ipsam', ut praedictum est; si ergo virtutes propter se amandae sunt, et eis fruendum est. – Ad quod dicimus: In illa descriptione, ubi dicitur 'propter se ipsam', intelligendum est 'tantummodo', ut scilicet ametur propter se ipsam tantum, ut non referatur ad aliud, sed ibi ponatur finis, ut supra ostendit Augustinus dicens: 'Si inhaeris atque permanseris, finem ponens laetitiae, tunc vere et proprie frui dicendus est: quod non est faciendum nisi in illa Trinitate, id est summo et incommu-

The books of the most revered medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, are loaded with passages using the term. Since the scale of being is one of his leitmotifs, it is easy to understand the frequency of use. However, this use of the concept as presupposition of the system does not entail that a lot of clarity is shed on it. As it would be in Plato, the highest good is the goal of our quest. The *summum bonum* is seen as the source of all, or as the goal of all. Aquinas will state that: 1. by natural dilection it happens that anyone loves God above all things, when He is known to be the supreme good, and thus liable of being loved in Himself. But we enjoy what we love for its own sake;⁷ 2. The Highest Good cannot be the cause of any evil;⁸ 3. Whatever is the Highest Good is pre-eminently then the goal of all things. But the Highest Good is one inasmuch as He is God. Therefore all things are ordered as to their end towards the one good which is God.⁹ Taking the overarching view of the tradition up to Aquinas, we can conclude that while already in Plato the form of the Good is the goal of striving by all subjects of knowledge because to seek to know is to have *eros* towards the Form of the Good, nevertheless this early theology is paradigmatically ontic (dealing in categories of being). Yet it does indeed have pressing ethical and epistemological consequences. However, once we move into the Christian context after Augustine, the striving is not merely gnoseological but has a more clearly soteriological side to it.

tabili bono'. – Utendum est ergo virtutibus, et per eas fruendum summo bono. Ita et de voluntate bona dicimus; Unde Augustinus in libro decimo De Trinitate ait: 'Voluntas est per quam fruimur'. Ita et per virtutes fruimur, non eis, nisi forte aliqua virtus sit Deus, ut caritas, de qua post tractabitur."

⁷ "Una ex parte essentiae. Objectum enim fruitionis est summa bonitas; unde fruitio respicit unamquamque personam, in quantum est summum bonum." S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum, ed. R.P. Mandonnet, vol. 1, Paris 1929, 39.

⁸ "Praeterea, summum bonum non potest esse causa alicujus mali, sicut nec summe calidum causa alicujus frigoris." Ibid., 988.

⁹ "Quod igitur est summum bonum, est maxime omnium finis. Sed summum bonum est unum tantum, quod est Deus: ut in primo libro probatum est. Omnia igitur ordinantur sicut in finem in unum bonum quod est Deus." S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia iussu edita Leonis XIII P.M., vol. 14: Appendix ad tertium librum Summae S. Thomae de Aquino contra Gentiles in quo textus autographi Vaticani a prima sua forma usque ad ultimam integre reproducitur, Rome 1926, 41.

2. Summum Bonum in Zwingli

The issue of the importance and use of the term *summum bonum* in Zwingli rises to prominence particularly because of its use in the *Sermon on Providence*.¹⁰ Here critics have long detected a particular way of doing theology, which seems to have as point of departure a philosophical argument rather than taking off immediately from the Biblical texts; this looked like a methodological infraction, a paganizing resource to plain reason. It thus caught the polemical attention of the Lutheran party in his time. It thus left a tinge of doubt that lasts to this day.¹¹ A closer inspection will show that Zwingli's argument runs in such a manner that it will come to rest mainly on Biblical texts and arguments at the climax of his demonstration; nevertheless, it is evident that his particular methodology here requires explanation.¹² It is obvious that he is well within the bounds of theological precedent, especially in view that philosophy in the Middle Ages was seen as a discipline both pro-paedeutic and ancillary to theology, and used so without embarrassment. It would be the newer standards of protestant Biblicism that would require a strictly scriptural argument, a condition to

¹⁰ Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke [Z], vol. 6.3, Zurich 1983 (Corpus Reformatorum 93.3), 1–230.

¹¹ See for example Leonhard von Muralt, Zwinglis dogmatisches Sondergut (Schluss), in: Zwingliana 5/7 (1932), 353–368, here 357–358: “Diese starke Einschränkung, die sich die Vernunft hier noch gefallen lassen muß, wenn auch prinzipiell durch den Gedanken der pädagogischen Stufenfolge ihr Wert gesichert ist, tritt nun in der Schrift ‘De providentia dei’ wesentlich zurück. Hier ist die Erkenntnis des Wesens Gottes (quid deus sit) nicht auf die biblische Offenbarung beschränkt. Biblische und außerbiblische Gotteserkenntnis stehen einander gleichwertig Seite an Seite.”

¹² The particularity of his thought in this regard is underlined even in sympathizing critics. In his description of Zwingli's doctrine of God as being and as good being, Martin Sallmann states: “Dieses Sein ist zudem auch das Gute. Zwingli nennt dafür drei Belege aus der Schrift. Von der guten Schöpfung Gottes, die dieser selbst als sehr gut betrachtet (Gen 1,31), schließt er zurück auf den guten Urheber. Zusammen mit der Stelle: ‘Niemand ist gut außer Gott allein’ (Lk 18,18), kommt es zu einer Wendung mit ‘pantheistischem’ Anklang, die Zwingli aber sofort einschränkt: ‘Wenn nämlich alle Dinge, die sind, gut sind, und dennoch allein Gott gut ist, ergibt sich, daß alle Dinge, die sind, Gott sind, das heißt, daher sind, weil Gott ist, und er die essentia von diesen ist.’ Das wird durch die dritte, bei Zwingli oft zitierte Stelle untermauert: ‘Da ja aus ihm und durch ihn und in ihm alle Dinge sind’ (Rom 11,36).” Martin Sallmann, Zwischen Gott und Mensch: Huldrych Zwinglis theologischer Denkweg im De vera et falsa religione commentarius (1525), Tübingen 1999 (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 108), 104.

which Zwingli usually is obliging. However, it is not necessary now to dwell on all possible reasons for this departure from the standard protestant model; rather it is necessary to point out the particular use and benefit that justifies Zwingli's approach in this text.¹³

Zwingli wishes to demonstrate the reality of divine providence in order to move on to the soteriology, in which God out of sheer goodness and grace delivers the human being from his sin. Ultimately, as the argument runs, without being responsible for sin, God indeed foresaw and allowed the fall to happen, as the necessity of the unstable union of the material and the spiritual in the human being necessarily would lead to his breaking of the law, the explicit will of God, in order for him to obtain true knowledge of good and evil. It is in the need to undergird the fact of divine providence that the concept *summum bonum* comes in. It is out of the very nature of God as the origin and maximum expression of goodness that Zwingli derives a provident care for creatures. Thus the concept *summum bonum* undergirds all theodicy in the *Sermon on Providence*. It must be added that the concept had been previously used by the Zurich reformer, but not in such a central role as in the *Sermon on Providence*.

The reformer's argument begins with a direct statement beginning chapter one: "Providence must exist, because the supreme good necessarily cares and regulates all things." Zwingli proceeds in clearly neo-platonic fashion defining the essence of the concept. The supreme good is so called not merely because it is a good surpassing all other real goods in quantity or quality, but because it is "the only thing good by nature." In fact we find reminiscences of Anselm's argument: every good that can be conceived is itself really this supreme good. In referring to God, Zwingli now supports now his argument with a Biblical quote by Christ: "Why do you call me good? There is none good but God." Thus, *Summum bonum* means ultimately that God alone deserves the name good:

¹³ Among the reasons one can conceive, is that the *Sermon on Providence* was a showpiece of Humanism, produced to demonstrate dialectical facility. It also might represent an effort to respond to a contemporary strain of thought that defended a notion of Stoic fate. It also principally addresses a question of theodicy, which if treated strictly on the basis of Biblical argument, ran the risk of being circular.

we see that God alone is good in the sense of being an absolutely and perfectly good being, and that consequently there can be nothing good which is not He. Other things can be called good only because the share in divine goodness, that is to say, by derivation.¹⁴

Zwingli continues arguing that what is good in the supreme degree must also be true, an argument most acceptable, as it derives from the root of the Platonic tradition. From here he derives that if the Supreme Divinity is the supreme good, and truth belongs to the nature of the good, the supremely true is also supreme might and power.¹⁵ With the understanding of faith we put together these philosophical conclusions and ultimately must see “both that Providence must exist and that it cares for and regulates all things.”

In other, previous text, where the term does not carry the burden of sustaining the whole argument, Zwingli reveals other aspects of his understanding of the concept. *In Adversus Hieronymum Emserum antibolon*, of 1524, he defines *summum bonum* as omnissufficiency for all creatures, relating it to the Hebrew concept: “See that I am the only God and there is none other besides me. To be the *summum bonum* is nothing else than dai: to be the all-sufficiency of all good things.”¹⁶ To be the *summum bonum* also im-

¹⁴ So comments von Muralt: “Da nämlich alles, was ist, gut ist, und dennoch Gott allein gut ist, folgt, daß alles, was ist, Gott ist (ut omnia, quae sunt, deus sint), d.h. deshalb ist, weil Gott ist und er das Wesen von allem ist (hoc est: ideo sint, quod deus est, et ipsorum essentia est). Damit will Zwingli doch nicht sagen, daß die Dinge gleich Gott sind, selber Gott sind, denn dann würden sie ihr Sein und ihre Güte aus sich selber haben. Er will eben sagen: Sofern überhaupt etwas ist, so kann es nur auf Grund von Gottes Sein auch Sein haben, und sofern etwas gut ist, so kann es nur auf Grund von Gott, der das höchste Gut ist, gut sein. Deshalb muß sich ja eben Gott von den Dingen unterscheiden weil er allein Güte und Sein hat, und die Dinge ihr Sein und ihre Güte erst von Gott haben. Ich habe bei diesen Stellen immer wieder den tiefen Eindruck, daß Zwingli nicht einfacher und nicht eindringlicher hätte sagen können, daß Gott der Herr der Welt ist, daß Gott allein Wirklichkeit und Wesen ist. Vom höchsten Gute aus gelangt.” *Muralt*, *Zwinglis dogmatisches Sondergut*, 363.

¹⁵ It seems Zwingli aims to establish three things: that God exists (by Anselmian ontological argument); that God is provident, i.e. cares for all inferior entities, something he seems to derive from God’s goodness; and that he is powerful and willing to carry out this providential care. There is an important change here in that in the Platonic tradition the Supreme Good is the passive attraction for erotic creatures, while in the Biblical sense God is active love.

¹⁶ “Videte, quod ego sim solus, et non sit alius deus præter me. ‘Deum autem esse’ non est aliud quam: summum bonum esse. Summum bonum esse, non est aliud quam dai [דַּי], hoc est: sufficientiam omnis boni esse. Bonum ergo illud se esse, deus nobis [...]” *Z* 3, 270.

plies being the highest wisdom and prudence, as he states in *De vera et falsa religione commentarius* of 1525.¹⁷ Here he also defines it as being perfect, absolute and lacking in nothing.¹⁸ In this text something else of great importance occurs. After defining *summum bonum* in the very same terms he later would use in *De Providentia*, Zwingli draws the inference that the *summum bonum* as *omnisufficientia* of all things implies the God is *our God*.¹⁹ In doing so, he moves from a necessary, ontological relation, to a volitional or covenantal one.

In *De vera et falsa religione* Zwingli uses *summum bonum* in the context of God's self-revelation in the disclosure of the divine name: I am who I am. For Zwingli, God reveals himself wholly in this expression. It means: I am by myself, by my own power, for myself. When he tells Moses to say to the people: "I am" sent me, it indicates He is the being of all things; ultimately He is the only being. All other things have a contingent and dependent being, and God sustains and governs all things. Therefore inasmuch as God is, he is good.²⁰ Inasmuch as he is truly and of himself, He alone is good, true, upright, just, holy; inasmuch as He is good, He is true, upright, etc.²¹ Inasmuch as all existing things are good, and nonetheless there is no good but God himself, it results that all things

¹⁷ "Nam istud, quod deus est, summum bonum non esset, ni simul summa sapientia et prudentia esset. Si enim quicquam esset, quod deum latere posset, illic nimirum sapientia [...]" Z 3, 647.

¹⁸ "[...] Et contra: Hoc solum deus est, quod perfectum est, id est: absolutum et cui nihil desit, cuique omnia adsint, quae summum bonum deceant. Non enim de perfecto hic loquimur, ut vulgo theologi." Z 3, 647.

¹⁹ Von Muralt envisions the connection in a somewhat different manner: "Zwingli läßt uns doch klar verstehen, wie er Philosophie und Religion zusammenwirken läßt. Die philosophische Gotteserkenntnis ist da, um dem Menschen mit allen Mitteln des Denkens die Größe und Allwirksamkeit Gottes einzuprägen und vor Augen zu stellen. Sinn hat allerdings diese Gotteserkenntnis erst, wenn sie die Menschen so ergreift, daß sie allein auf Gott vertrauen, wenn ein persönliches Verhältnis daraus wird, das den Menschen verpflichtet. So ist für Zwingli seine philosophische Gotteserkenntnis nicht ein gelehrter Hemmschuh, sondern eine mächtige Stütze geworden, indem er in seinem Denken die Notwendigkeit und Wirklichkeit Gottes anerkannt und dann diese für sein Leben fruchtbar gemacht hat." Muralt, Zwinglis dogmatisches Sondergut, 364. In spite of the less specific description, the connection between the being of God as *summum bonum* and his beneficent impact on the human being's life is clearly detected.

²⁰ "Illud ergo esse tam est bonum, quam est esse." Z 3, 645.

²¹ "Sicut enim solum est, et seipso est, ita et solum bonum, verum, rectum, iustum, sanctum est; nam seipso bonum est, verum, rectum etc." Z 3, 645.

are God, that is they are in Him and through Him.²² Now Zwingli supports his arguments with a Pauline quote: for from him and through him and in him are all things. (Rom. 11:36). The seeming pantheism this radical theo-centrism implies has been criticized both in Zwingli and in one of his possible sources, Pico della Mirandola.²³ However, in both authors it is a standard Neo-Platonist conception. Besides, it is clear from the context Zwingli does not intend the non-orthodox meaning. The main importance is the relating of the term *summum bonum* not only to the very essence of God, but particularly to God's self-revelation in the disclosure of the divine name, for it implies an approach to humanity, a preliminary covenanting relationship to the people.

Finally, in *Subsidium sive coronis de eucharistia*, also of 1525, *summum bonum* again immediately implies redemption. "And this one, who you worship and adore thus, is so your God, that is to say, *summum bonum*, who freely gives himself over to you, that he would lower Himself on your behalf in order to reconcile you."²⁴ This definition comes in the midst of a discussion of the *foedus* or covenant, therefore in a completely soteriological context. We may conclude, then, that in Zwingli the purely philosophical use of

²² "Si nunc omnia, quae fecit, vehementer bona sunt etiam se iudice, et nihilominus nemo bonus est nisi solus deus, sequitur, quod omnia, quae sunt, in ipso et per ipsum sunt. Cum enim omnia, quae sunt, bona sunt, et tamen solus deus bonus est, fit, ut omnia, quae sunt, deus sint, hoc est: ideo sint, quod deus est, et ipsorum essentia est. Quod Paulus sic extulit Ro. 11. [Rom 11:36]: 'Quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia'." Z 3, 645.

²³ The issue of Zwingli's potential dependence on Pico della Mirandola is explored by Irena Backus, among others (Irena Backus, *Randbemerkungen Zwinglis in den Werken von Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, in: *Zwingliana* 18/4-5 [1990/91], 291-309). It is also worthwhile to mention that in one of Pico's works read by Zwingli, the relationship between being and goodness in God is discussed. Pico states in *De ente et uno*: "Adiiciam et hoc iniuria gloriari quosdam Platonicos quasi mysterium habeant Aristoteli ignotum, cum dicunt duas esse proprias Dei appellationes, unum scilicet et bonum, atque ita bonum et unum ante ens esse. Sicut enim ostendimus non latere Peripateticos quo modo supra ens Deus intelligi possit, possumus et hoc ostendere duo in primis haec nomina, boni scilicet et unius, Deo Aristotelem dedisse." (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate Heptalus De ente et uno*, ed. Eugenio Garin, Florence 1942, 404). Pico also makes note of the revelation to Moses of the divine name in relation to the essential qualities of God.

²⁴ "At ille, quem sic colis et adoras, sic est deus tuus, hoc est: summum bonum, quod se tibi gratuito impertit, ut pro te in mortem sese abiecerit, quo te sibi reconciliaret." Z 4, 500.

summum bonum in argument, is to the effect of undergirding divine providence, which is then used to support a soteriological theodicy. This occurs in the special case of *De providentia*. Elsewhere and previously, we may conclude that Zwingli ties *summum bonum* closely to the divine name, and thus to self-revelation. It ultimately stands as the basis for the divine part in the covenant, although not in a totally explicit fashion. The soteriological intention has substantially displaced the ontological use and now pervades and ultimately predominates in the use of the concept.

3. Summum Bonum in Bullinger

The term *summum bonum* is only cited once in the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* at chapter three, the first paragraph.²⁵ It is used as part of a formal, philosophical definition of God, thus showing one of the term's main functions in Bullinger's theology.

In the apologetic work, *Confessio et expositio simplex orthodoxae fidei et dogmatum Catholicorum sinceræ religionis Christianae*, God is defined using *summum bonum* among other terms: "We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting of Himself, sufficient by Himself in all things, invisible, incorporeal, immense, eternal, creator of all things, both visible and invisible, *highest good*, living and giving life and conserving all things, omnipotent, knowing to the greatest degree, clement or merciful, just and truthful." This is the same definition he used in *The Old Faith*.

In the *Decades*, we find a similar connection between the biblical texts and the philosophical concept, once again, in the description of the divine names. Peter Opitz in his discussion of Bullinger's theology in the *Decades*, stresses how the divine essence is expressed through the names. Particularly in relationship to *El Shad-*

²⁵ "Deum credimus et docemus unum esse essentia vel natura, per se subsistentem, sibi ad omnia sufficientem invisibilem, incorporeum, immensum, aeternum, creatorem rerum omnium, cum visibilium tum invisibilium, summum bonum, vivum, et omnia vivificantem et conservantem, omnipotentem et summe sapientem, clementem sive misericordem, iustum atque veracem." E. F. Karl Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, Leipzig 1903, 173.

dai, the concept *summum bonum* becomes explicit: the self-designation *Shaddai*, with which God represents himself in the context of his covenanting with Abraham, not only means his self-sufficiency in the sense of his self-reliance and independence, but also the quality flowing out of Him as being the highest good and the source of all goodness.²⁶ The soteriological implications of God's self-disclosure through the names become clear. To paraphrase Opitz, Bullinger sees the name "Yahweh" as connected to his nature as life-creating and life-sustaining; the name "El" as relating to God's helping presence; the name "Shaddai" as pertaining to the divine covenanting commitment, and to his acknowledgement of his being the highest good, and of his role as the one who can and will provide salvation.²⁷ Bullinger then goes on to produce an etymology of the German word *Gott* as meaning "bonum sive optimum maximum, das höchste, oberist gut."²⁸

In *Compendium christianae religionis decem libris comprehensum*, God is the Highest Good particularly for humanity: God is the creator and governor of all created things, and the highest good of humans. Thus the stress is laid not so much in his ontological status as in the relationship to humanity.²⁹

In *The Old Faith* he also uses the term briefly to describe God, among other attributes. However, a particular aspect of Bullinger's understanding of the function of the term is immediately apparent. The importance is that the covenant, *I will be your God*, is the place Bullinger understands *summum bonum* should appear. *Summum bonum*, God's very nature, is the divine compliance in the covenant: I shall be your God, you shall be my people. God Himself is the basis of faith, thus the expression is related to the

²⁶ Peter Opitz, Heinrich Bullinger als Theologe: Eine Studie zu den "Dekaden", Zurich 2004, 163.

²⁷ "Qui solus omnia habet, quae pertinent ad perfectam huius et futuri saeculi felicitatem, solus exaturare potest." Cited in Opitz, Heinrich Bullinger, 163, note 35.

²⁸ Cited in Opitz, Heinrich Bullinger, 163, note 35. – This designation of God as best and highest was in antiquity applied to Zeus, and in a Christian context was very often found in buildings in the Renaissance, and before that in the Benedictine tradition.

²⁹ "Cum Deus omnium rerum conditarum creator sit et gubernator, ac summum hominis bonum, [...]" Heinrich Bullinger, *Compendium christianae religionis decem libris comprehensum*, Zurich 1569, 20v.

commandment: *you shall have no other gods*. This is a salvation-historical context:

“Now wholly on the contrary fairness itself required that this man, who had been endowed by God with a subtle reason, and singular sharpness of intellect and goodness of will and exceptional strength, would show himself grateful towards Him who had amply bestowed him with gifts, and be most dutiful in everything to his benefactor Creator. Indeed God who not only was good but also just, ordered the human being (having enacted a fair ordinance) truly to enjoy fully all the delightful fruits of the garden, as long as he abstained from the fruits of the knowledge of good and evil. This precept in itself was neither burdensome nor unfair, for it did not postulate anything but loving obedience and reverence to the Divine spirit: unto whom alone man should look with the eyes of the soul and to him hold fast with whole faith and trust as highest good and as most benign towards men, and not make up on his own the forms of good and evil, but rather to take as unlawful what God forbids, and from all to take as good and just that which God not only approves, but permits and commands (which is much safer).”³⁰

This salvation-historical approach is reinforced later in the text, when *summum bonum* is turned into *summus thesaurus*:³¹

“Abel lived humbly, was upright and trusted God firmly. He always held God as his highest treasure, and offered him the best and foremost gifts he had, doubtless holding the opinion in his mind that this very God was creator of all souls with bodies and of all faculties, and was beyond com-

³⁰ “Iam e converso omnino aequitas ipsa expostulabat, ut ille homo, qui subtili ratione, et singulari intellectus acrimonia voluntatisque bonitate et viribus praestantibus a deo praeditus erat, erga eundem, qui amplissima haec in eum effunderat dona, gratum se exhiberet, atque benefactori creatori et domino per omnia esset obsequentissimus. Imo deus qui non modo bonus sed et iustus est, tale quiddam (promulgata lege aequa) ab homine postulabat, nimirum ut omnibus amoenissimi huius horti fructibus ad voluptatem usque frueretur, tantum a fructu scientiae boni ac mali abstineret. Id praeceptum per se neque graue neque iniquum erat, siquidem nihil aliud postulabat, quam obedientiam cum dilectione et reverentia divini numinis: in quod homo dei creatura oculus animi unice intendere, in hoc ut summum bonum et erga hominines benignissimum, omnem spem et fiduciam figere, non autem ex semetipso sapere formasque boni et mali fingere debeat, uerum (quod tutius multo est) tantum id illicitum putet, quod Deus prohibuit: e diverso ea omnia tanquam bona ac iusta probet, quae deus non solum permisit sed et praecepit.” Heinrich Bullinger, *Antiquissima fides et vera religio*, Zurich 1544, 4v.

³¹ This description is also used in the discussion of the Creed in the Catechism for adults: they should see God as “*Omnium bonorum thesaurus*.” Heinrich Bullinger, *Catechesis pro adultioribus scripta, de his potissimum capitibus*, Zurich 1559, 32.

mitting any hypocrisy or deceit; and also sought every good in Him as most beneficent.”³²

Noah had saving faith, which took hold on Christ the promise, believing that God is the source of all good:

“Believing these words firmly, Noah served God through Christ. He showed openly and clearly these particular signs of faith, before the deluge, which covered everything after the rains, once they had gone down, as soon as he had left the arch, he hastened to offer sacrifice; as if he were offering testimony by most certain marks and arguments from the heart of his gratitude and fastness of faith: at the same time confessing *God to be the author of all goodness*, who had promised to him and his posterity the blessed seed, which is to say, he had promised his own Son, so that he may reconcile the human race to divine justice by the sacrifice of his own body.”³³

In the previous text *summum bonum* has become *deum omnium bonorum esse authorem*, which is pretty much the previous theological definition.

In the book, *Antithesis et compendium evangelicae et papisticae doctrinae* Bullinger utilizes the concept *summum bonum* as the basis for the rejection of the cult and invocation of saints: “God is the only, eternal, and highest good, who wishes alone to be adored, worshipped and invoked. In Him alone and in no other whatsoever the absolute good is to be found. Only in His Name should it be sworn.”³⁴

³² In the latin version of *The Old Faith*: “cumque deum pro summo suo thesauro haberet [...]” Bullinger, *Antiquissima fides*, 15v.

³³ “His verbis firmiter credens Noe, a deo per Christum servatus est. Hic ut certis quibusdam signis fidem suam apertius atque evidentius ostenderet, quamprimum aquae diluuii, quae ex imbribus auctae omnia contexterant, iam subsedissent, protinus relicta arca, ad sacrificia offerenda properavit: quibus veluti certissimis iudiciis et argumentis animi sui et gratitudinem, et constantiam fidei testarentur: simul etiam confiteretur deum omnium bonorum esse authorem, qui sibi, suisque posteris semen benedictum, id est filium suum promiserit, qui corporis sui perlitatione humanum genus diuinae iustitiae reconciliet.” Bullinger, *Antiquissima fides*, 19v.

³⁴ “Deus est unicum, aeternum et summum bonum, qui solus vult adorari, coli et invocari. In solo enim neque in alio quoquam invenitur absolutiss. bonum. Per ipsius solius nomen iurandum est.” Heinrich Bullinger, *Antithesis et compendium evangelicae et papisticae doctrinae*, Zurich 1551, 4.

In his *Catechism for adults* Bullinger asks: "In which way or when do we sanctify the name of the Lord? The answer is, when we feel and speak about God and things of religion in a pious and saintly way, giving honor: when we place nothing before God and divine things, but rather we hold as most important and principal his established laws about doctrine and rites, and acknowledge the Lord himself as highest good: from whom alone we depend, in whom only in all things we regard, whom we invoke and praise and glorify [...]"³⁵ So too in the same work when dealing with the covenant he specifies the way God fulfills his part in it: "Explain to me then how God wishes to make himself available to human beings? Answer: He desires to be our God, not in a common or universal way, but in a particular and singular way: that is, He wishes to be our wholeness and total sufficiency in whom then we may have all good things most handily and abundantly, both of the soul and of the body, both present and future [...]"³⁶

In this context, God as *summum bonum* is not merely the supreme good in the chain of being, but the supreme good for the human covenanting partner. Notice the expression "vult esse plenitudo et omnisufficientia nostra: in quo videlicet habeamus omnia [...] praestantissima abundantissimaque bona." Is this not the traditional definition of *summum bonum*? But this passage makes God's status as *summum bonum* much more specific: he is the source of all good for those in the covenant of grace! Can we not read in this expression "non modo communis [...] sed veluti peculiaris" as an affirmation of an elective grace, a chosen people? Is it not a passing from a general to a particular grace? In a sense our part in the Covenant is, as Watson would say of Luther's theology of grace, letting God be God.³⁷

³⁵ Bullinger, *Catechesis*, 17r-v.

³⁶ "Explica ergo mihi qualem se deus velit paestare hominibus? Vult ille non modo communis vel universalis, sed veluti peculiaris uniuscuiusque nostrum esse deus: id est, vult esse plenitudo et omnisufficientia nostrae: in quo videlicet habeamus omnia, cum anime, tum corporis, et presentis et futurae, praestantissima abundantissima bona [...]" Bullinger, *Catechesis*, 7r-v.

³⁷ Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God*, London 1947. – It is worthwhile to notice that a similar, although distinctive accommodation of the platonic concept of God's goodness is found in Calvin. Here the stress is on the terms of participation and accommodation, which are so understood as to avoid a mingling or confusion of substances,

Now a further difference becomes apparent: Zwingli has not neglected the Trinitarian aspect of the divinity. This omnisufficiency is transferred to Christ, who then becomes our plenitude, as the work *Der Christenheit rechte Volkommenheit* clearly shows. Bullinger cites several New Testament texts with a Platonist tinge, in this particular case in order to counter any claims that the church may raise as a divine-human mediator (*contra* Trent): “That God the Father, in his only-begotten Son alone has given us all full perfection, so that when we hold unto Him in true faith, nor should we go begging for that perfection elsewhere.”³⁸

Thus the fullness and saving quality of God the Creator is to be found only in Christ.³⁹ And this testimony is received in the believer’s hearts:

“With this believers receive in their hearts from the Holy Spirit, through the narrative of the word of truth that all perfection is in Christ; therefore they are at peace, and are based solely on him. And thus they find no one anywhere at all to be an equal to the son of God, in wisdom, power, righteousness, graciousness, good-willing, or which so eager and ready, who is so adroit and fast with things. He has all our concerns before his eyes. As soon as he receives the prayer of the believer he attends to it the very moment. Therefore all believers rush solely to the only Lord Christ.”⁴⁰

The previous text reveals that *summum bonum* as title or characteristic of God relates to Christology. This is borne out by the following quote from *Fundamentum Firmum*, where the relationship is made even more explicit:

and ensuring a preservation of the distinction between creator and creature. See Paul Christoph Böttger, Gott, der Brunnquell aller Güter – gibt es einen “mystischen” Grundzug in der Theologie Calvins?, in: *Zwingliana* 19/2 (1993), 59–72.

³⁸ “[...] das Gott der vatter in sinem eingebornenn sun allein alle voellige volkommenheit uns gaeben habe / das wenn wir inn in warem glouben besitzend / gar nit doerffind soelche volkommenheit anderschwo har erbaettlen.” Heinrich Bullinger, *Der Christenheit rechte Volkommenheit*, Zurich 1551, 28.

³⁹ Bullinger, *Der Christenheit rechte Volkommenheit*, 34.

⁴⁰ “Darzuo empfindend die gloebigen in jren hertzen vom heligen geist / durch ds wort der warheit bericht / das allein in Christo alle volkommenheit ist: dorumb sind sy ze friden / und beruowend allein in jm. Sy findend ouch nieman nienan ueberall der glych sye den son Gottes / an wyssheit / macht / gerechtigkeit / guetickeit / guotwilligkeit / oder der so empsig und fertig / so geschickt und schnell mit sinen sachen sye. Er hat all unser ding vor sinen ougen. So bald er vernimpt die bitt der gloebigen so gewaeret er sy ouch dess ougenblicks. Darumb ylend alle gloebigen einig allein zue dem einigen herren Christo.” Bullinger, *Der Christenheit rechte Volkommenheit*, 34.

“So that no doubt may remain in any, I consequently bring forth the witness of Holy Scripture, that the church in the Lord Christ has all plenitude/fullness, and by faith in Him thus is perfected or absolved, that all life and salvation should be expected, not elsewhere but alone from Christ. For the Lord in Isaiah calls all unto Him, and promises to them the whole fullness of all good things, and says, O you who thirst, Come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat.”⁴¹

Here Bullinger states clearly that the church has all plenitude in Christ, and by faith is perfected and granted life only inasmuch as it trusts solely in Him. And the Lord in Isaiah, calling all unto Himself, promises to all the whole fullness [*saturitas*] of all good [*bonorum omnium*]. Thus closeness, even equivalency is traced between God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ. Bullinger shows thus that when he speaks of God as *summum bonum* he ultimately has in mind the whole Trinity.

Such passages which speak of perfection or plenitude obviously depend conceptually on the letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:19; 2:9). In Ephesians 1:23 the Greek has ἡτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου; this is rendered in the Vulgate: “quae est corpus ipsius plenitudo eius qui omnia in omnibus adimplentur.” In his *Commentary on the Pauline epistles*, Bullinger understands these passages in a fully soteriological sense, relating them not primarily to the ontology of God or of creation, but to an eschatological fulfillment which occurs in Christ’s life and death. (We must remember in Bullinger the divine essence as *summum bonum* becomes manifest as mercy and overflowing love, which is the divine condition in the covenant. The covenant is God being Himself towards us, His being overflowing goodness). Bullinger here stresses the glorification and resurrection doctrines, and how

⁴¹ “Sed ne quid dubitationis apud ullos resideat, commonstrabo consequenter scripturae sanctae testimoniis, Ecclesiam Christi in Christo domino omnem habere plenitudinem, ac per fidem in ipsum ita perfici vel absolui, ut omnia vitae et salutis non aliunde, nisi ex solo Christo expectet. Etenim Dominus apud Isaiam omnes ad se vocat, omnibusque plenam bonorum omnium saturitatem promittit, ac dicit, O vos omnes qui sititis, Venite ad aquas, et hi quibus non est pecunia, venite, emite et comedite. Parate cibum sine argento, et sine precio vinum et lac.” Heinrich Bullinger, *Fundamentum firmum, cui tuto fidelis quivis inniti potest, hoc praesertim difficili seculo, quo dissidiis doctorumque adversariis scriptis omnia conturbata sunt*, Zurich 1563, 16v.

believers participate in these benefits through union with Christ. “Therefore Paul in this place understands by these words and things the diverse collection of excellent things in the world, not only the worldly, but also the celestial; that is, the domain of all things visible and invisible. [...] For then those who trust in Christ are the participants in all heavenly goods, given that we be members of the body of Christ, and he our head.”⁴² Bullinger refutes the error of those who may think this means that evil deeds are fulfilled or perfected in us by Christ. Rather, this means that he teaches rather that Christ is τὸ πλήρωμα, that is, the plenitude of believers and their supplement;⁴³ who by his infirmities fills and absolves those who are destitute and flatly empty of divine things. At the end he states that God in Jesus Christ has poured himself totally and opened up for us all the treasures of knowledge and salvation.⁴⁴

In Colossians 2:9 the text reads, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς; in the Vulgate: quia in ipso inhabitat omnis plenitudo divinitatis corporaliter. The word πλήρωμα will become the standard neo-platonic term for the One which out of essential superabundance overflows thus creating the world, and which is the fount of all good, the *summum bonum*.⁴⁵ In the discussion of this passage Bullinger is even more reformatory and soteriological. He states it means that nothing beyond Christ is necessary for us. Having Christ, the church has all things; whoever has been grafted into him by faith, likewise is wholly perfected and justified. All things relevant to life and salvation are to be sought only in Christ. After discussing the meaning of *corporaliter* to mean not bodily, but naturally, Bullinger surprises us by implying a parallel between redemption and creation, saying that Christ is, properly and at the same time with the Father, the principle of all created things.⁴⁶ In essence, then, he transfers the

⁴² Heinrich Bullinger, In omnes Apostolicas epistolas divi videlicet Pauli XIII. et VII. canonicas commentarii, Zurich 1537, 413.

⁴³ *Supplementum* is ample in scope; here it probably means he completes them and supplies their needs.

⁴⁴ Bullinger, In omnes Apostolicas epistolas, 413.

⁴⁵ For a detailed history of the term πλήρωμα see Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols., Grand Rapids, MI 1964, s.v.

content of the epithet *summum bonum* from an unqualified "God" to Christ.

To conclude, we can state that in Bullinger *summum bonum* is a term to be associated with the divine name, and which he has received from the tradition. But for the most part it is not an irreplaceable description, for other terms can take its place. The term *summum bonum* stands above all for the one-sidedness of the covenant, the sovereign grace of God. It is at times explicitly connected with salvation in Christ, as a way of introducing the divine side of the covenant, God as source of all grace. Thus too, when approaching New Testament elements of Christology having a Platonic conceptual affinity, the term functions to hold in close relation the creative and the redemptive power of Christ. While Bullinger is faithful to the general concept and to the relationship of the term to the divine name Zwingli already used, the general tendency is to leave further behind the ontological and to emphasize more strongly the covenantal and soteriological aspect. What in Zwingli is a tendency to direct the ontological import of the term *summum bonum* in a soteriological direction, in Bullinger becomes a quite consistent basis for the development of covenant theology.

Aurelio A. García, PhD, Professor of Humanities at the College of General Studies, University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Abstract: Huldrych Zwingli has been rashly criticized for his philosophical theology, manifest in works such as "De Providentia Dei", by those whose measure of what constituted the true Reformation was a strict Biblicism, and who viewed philosophical theology as a corrupt remnant from medieval scholasticism. Yet Zwingli deftly uses the concept with its doctrinal baggage in order to support a doctrine of God's Providence and grace towards humanity. Ultimately the Reformer derives providence and predestination, indeed the whole salvific economy, from a philosophical concept of God as supreme power and as highest good. In his own time Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger, had to defend Zwingli's openness to classical philosophy and his acceptance of the pagan quest for truth. This concept of "Summum bonum" also occurs in Bullinger at key points, being not only understood as all-sufficiency but also related to the

⁴⁶ "Nam loquutio est id omnino pollens, quasi quis nostrum dicat, Non est opus aliis rebus ad perfectionem, quod adversarii nostril tradunt, reuera enim omnis rerum divinarum plenitudo et perfectio in Christo vere et naturaliter est non usurpative aut alieno more, esd omnino proprio cum simul cum patre sit principium rerum omnium creaturarum dominus potentissimorum spirituum angelorum et quicquid hic mundus magnificum potens et excellens habet." *Bullinger*, In omnes Apostolicas epistolas, 485.

names of God and thus to the Divine self-revelation, indeed as a source of covenant history. This paper explores the roots of this concept and how it evolves into a salvation-historical and therefore biblical motif in the Zurich Reformation and thus its import for the understanding of God's relation to the created order.

Keywords: Huldrych Zwingli; Heinrich Bullinger; Summum bonum; Reformed theology; doctrine of God

