

Thuyen Tran Violates the Amazon Rules for Customer Reviews

This is not a formal review or rebuttal. These are informal notes from an interview with Leighton Flowers on *Soteriology 101* responding to Tran's unscholarly errors in his 'non-reviews' of my books.

Thuyen Tran's Opinion on *The Foundation of Augustinian Calvinism*

https://www.amazon.com/product-reviews/108280035X/ref=acr_dp_hist_1?ie=UTF8&filterByStar=one_star&reviewerType=all_re

Thuyen Tran's Opinion on *Augustine's Conversion*

https://www.amazon.com/product-reviews/3161557530/ref=acr_dp_hist_1?ie=UTF8&filterByStar=one_star&reviewerType=all_re

Thuyen Tran's Rating comment:

[1.0 out of 5 stars "Really bad kingdom of the cults level "scholarship"](#)

Is my Oxford work "really bad kingdom of the cults scholarship" like Tran claims? Then how did it incite accolades at Oxford during my oral defense, excellent book reviews, and be published by a premier publisher – Mohr Siebeck that published the Dead Sea Scrolls? *Augustine's Conversion* was examined by three Patristics scholars at Oxford, two Patristics scholars at Mohr Siebeck, and has book reviews by two Patristics scholars. If my Oxford work is "really bad kingdom of the cults scholarship" then by analogy Tran is still pooping in his diaper in the sandbox.

Tran blatantly 1) violates the Google Rules for a review, 2) gives a fake review to pontificate his own opinion, 3) cannot seem to understand the difference between the universal ECF's inherited sin nature with *culpa* versus Augustine's novel inherited guilt (*reatus*) unto damnation, 4) repeatedly assumes his premise that original sin with water baptism for infants in the ECFs means damnable Augustinian original sin, 5) and then repeatedly commits libel against me by claiming I wrote things that I did not write.

"Wilson's dissertation was thoroughly dishonest and written as a smear piece not only against Augustine but all who don't fit his age of accountability freewill Baptist views."

I never discussed an age of accountability and I am not a Freewill Baptist. Tran is dishonest.

Tran commits numerous sophomoric errors.

Notice first of all that this fake review is not in a theological journal. That would require peer review, and no theological journal would publish Tran's vitriolic opinion piece. His is not a book review. A book review discusses the major points of the book and briefly compares it with other authors in the field. Tran completely missed the major point in my book. He spends fifty

paragraphs arguing for his own view. It is a vitriolic opinion piece, not a book review. He could never have it published in any peer reviewed journal. That would require scholarship on his part.

Second, Tran violates three of Amazon's Community Guidelines for submission. It asserts his opposing religious opinion. He commits name-calling and attack because he disagrees, and it looks like he lined up uneducated people to agree with him.

Here are Amazon's Community Guidelines:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=201929730&language=en_US&ref=efph_home_cont_YRKB5RU3FS5TURN

1. Don't engage in name-calling or attack people based on whether you agree with them.
2. "... don't express hatred or intolerance for people on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender or gender identity, religion"
3. "Don't attempt to drown out other people's opinions, including by posting from multiple accounts or coordinating with others." (Tran seems to have enlisted persons who agreed with his own religion to drown out my work by purporting his opposing religious opinion in review 'likes')

Third, Tran makes false statements claiming I said things I never wrote in the book. Tran began with a one star rating for "woefully full of misinformation and misquotes." I never misquote – that is a lie. Tran misquotes me. Tran ended with, "Wilson's dissertation was thoroughly dishonest and written as a smear piece not only against Augustine but all who don't fit his age of accountability freewill Baptist views." Tran commits libel. I never mentioned an age of accountability. I am not a "freewill Baptist." Tran is zero for three. Strikeout.

In contrast to Tran's pejorative biased opinion, numerous academic reviews in peer reviewed journals by scholars demonstrate the scholarly quality of this book. Tran should learn how to write a book review. There is an easy way to tell if a review is biased. A book review is supposed to point out the good and bad aspects of a book. When **everything** written is bad, it

belies bias. Again in contrast, this dissertation was accepted at The University of Oxford for a doctorate in philosophy and published by a major academic publisher – Mohr Siebeck – in a highly respected series. Scholars think it is accurate, ground breaking, and well written.

In contrast, Tran's fake review is an inappropriate abuse of Google policy. No scholarly journal would ever publish it.

Tran commits the straw man fallacy. He writes refuting a straw man – a premise the book never claims. “Central to this theme is Ken Wilson's accusation of Augustine after 411 AD inventing John 3:5 baptismal saving requirement to replace physical birth view of water in the passage. For Wilson, such view of John 3:5 is a denial of free choice theology taught by pre-Augustine fathers, especially when that view also includes infants needing baptism for salvation.” “Consider this point by Wilson: holding to traditional free choice theology requires rejecting John 3:5 as baptismal salvation text.” Wilson claimed “Augustine invented baptismal salvation and John 3:5 as prooftext.

Tran's claim is blatantly false. I wrote that Augustine invented paedobaptism as essential to save infants from hell because they carried Adam's inherited damnable guilt; and, Augustine used John 3:5 as a major prooftext to do so. No person prior to Augustine claimed unbaptized babies went to hell due to Adam's inherited sin. I have never claimed any ECF taught John 3:5 as physical birth. Again, Tran commits libel. It is my opinion the ECFs (all non-Jews and many anti-Semitic) fell into error by not understanding the Hebrew parallelism used by Jesus in John 3:3-6.

What is the context? Physical birth – entering a second time into his mother's womb to be born physically. Jesus says entering the kingdom requires two births – one in water and one in spirit. He repeats this in Hebrew parallelism. That which is born of the flesh physically is physical and

what is born spiritually is spiritual. Two births are required – one physical and one spiritual. Being born a Jew as a son of Abraham is not enough. Since the mother's womb and physical birth are in the context, water means the water breaking for physical birth of the child. Spirit means spiritual birth by faith. A double meaning is probable from Ezekiel 36:25 of sprinkling or cleansing water from the new Spirit internally. That is the context – baptism is NOWHERE IN the context – read the passage and think. The ECFs allegorized this passage to mean water baptism out of context DUE TO not knowing Hebrew parallelism. Water was used of physical birth in the OT and Intertestamental Literature – see

Job 38:8, Or *who* shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, *as if* it had issued out of the womb?

Job 28: 29 Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?

4 Ezra 8.8 “And because you give life to the body which is now fashioned in the womb , and furnish it with members, what you have created is preserved in fire and water, and for nine months the womb that fashioned bears your creation which has been created in it.”

Plus there are numerous references in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Hymns Scroll, IQH, Hymns 3, 6, 10, 24).

I am not the first scholar to see physical birth in the context:

John Calvin, *Commentary on John 3* section 6:

Hence it is evident that we must be formed by the second birth, that we may be fitted for the kingdom of God; and the meaning of Christ's words is, that as a man is born only carnal from the womb of his mother; he must be formed anew by the Spirit, that he may begin to be spiritual.

Persons who think water baptism is essential for justification must do gymnastics to make John

3:5 and 1 Cor. 15 not contradict one another. In 1 Cor. 15:14-17 Paul wrote, “For Christ did not

send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”

Thuyen Tran: *Augustine's Conversion* Non-Book Review Rant on Amazon

[1.0 out of 5 stars Woefully full of misinformation and misquotes of pre-Augustine fathers to smear Augustine](#)

Reviewed in the United States on September 16, 2020

Verified Purchase

Recently, the Provisionist crowd, led by Leighton Flowers, has pushed the notion that Ken Wilson is foremost Augustine scholar to bash Augustine as introducing Manichaeism, Gnostic, Platonic and other pagan beliefs into the early church to give us "Calvinism." Central to this theme is Ken Wilson's accusation of Augustine after 411 AD inventing John 3:5 baptismal saving requirement to replace physical birth view of water in the passage. For Wilson, such view of John 3:5 is a denial of free choice theology taught by pre-Augustine fathers, especially when that view also includes infants needing baptism for salvation.

This requires him to really abuse the pre-Augustine fathers as well as pre-412 Augustine on John 3:5. Pre- and post-412 Augustine on the passage will be dealt with in the next article. Here, the pre-Augustine fathers will be dealt with in detail.

Wilson's dissertation in book form, titled Augustine's "Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to "Non-free Free Will" will be cited here and interacted with on pre-Augustine fathers and John 3:5.

On page 120, he wrote, "In 'De baptismo,' we find abundant proof of Augustine's persistent traditional free theology." What was that proof? According to Wilson, Augustine then in 400 AD held to "salvation can occur without water baptism" as if he denied that after 411 AD (which is false). Wilson used that to argue that "John 3:5 has not yet evolved into a proof text." (Again, false, since the very reference Wilson referred to from Augustine's On Baptism 2.19 actually treated as John 3:5 as baptismal rebirth text.)

The question is Proof text for what? Proof text for baptism as salvation from Adam's inherited guilt Augustine's proof text verses for his later pagan doctrines are listed repeatedly.

Tran either missed this major point or ignored it. He missed the context.

Consider this point by Wilson: holding to traditional free choice theology requires rejecting John 3:5 as [a] baptismal salvation text.

False. Certainly a person can teach water baptismal regeneration and believe in traditional free choice – many of the early church fathers taught water baptism regeneration – read Ferguson's *Baptism in the Early Church*. But what is my context? – Adam's inherited guilt – one CANNOT logically believe in free choice and also teach Augustine's water baptismal regeneration to save from Adam's inherited guilt. Why? Because God decides which baby is baptized and which ones are damned. There is no free choice. Tran either misses, is incapable of understanding, or deliberately ignores the major theme of my research.

In that case, if we go by that, then the pre-Augustine fathers were anti-traditional free choice theology. To the man, they held to John 3:5 as baptismal rebirth requirement proof-text.

Yet, according to Wilson, on page 167, it was post-411 Augustine who “reinterprets John 3:5 as water baptism instead of physical birth (‘water breaking’) versus spiritual rebirth.” The irony of Wilson accusing Augustine of novelties including this based off Gnosticism and Manichaeism is that it was the Docetist Gnostics who held to the physical birth reading of John 3:5 and were called out for it by church father and martyr Hippolytus’ Refutation of All Heresies:

“This is, says (the Docetic), what the Saviour affirms: Unless a man be born of water and spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven, because that which is born of the flesh is flesh.”

Tran fails to recognize Hippolytus is quoting the Docetic Gnostics. Hippolytus is not “Calling out” anybody here. He makes no comment on John 3:5. The Docetists used John 3:5 to explain their two bodies of Jesus – one physical body (the flesh) and one spiritual body (the spirit).

washed in Jordan, and [Jesus] when He was [baptized](#) He received a figure and a seal in the water of (another spiritual booty beside) the body born of the [Virgin](#). (And the object of this was,) when the Archon condemned his own peculiar figment (of flesh) to death, (that is,) to the [cross](#), that that [soul](#) which had been nourished in the body (born of the Virgin) might strip off that body and nail it to the (accursed) tree. (In this way the [soul](#)) would triumph by means of this (body) over principalities and powers, and would not be found naked, but would, instead of that flesh, assume the (other) body, which had been represented in the water when he was being [baptized](#). This is, says (the Docetic), what the Saviour affirms: Unless a man be born of water and spirit, he will not enter into the [kingdom of heaven](#), because that which is born of the flesh is flesh. [John 3:5-6](#) From the thirty Aeons, therefore, (the Son) assumed thirty forms.

Not to mention the likes of Tertullian condemned Cainite Gnostics for rejecting baptismal salvation in On Baptism Chapter 1: “Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life! A treatise on this matter will not be superfluous; instructing not only such as are just becoming formed (in the faith), but them who, content with having simply believed, without full examination of the grounds of the traditions, carry (in mind), through ignorance, an untried though probable faith. The consequence is, that a viper of the Cainite heresy, lately conversant in this quarter, has carried away a great number with her most venomous doctrine, making it her first aim to destroy baptism.”

This quote only affirms water baptism as washing away sins which was commonplace in the ECFs. I never claimed the view of water baptism as salvific was novel. I stated Augustine’s view of water baptism as removing Adam’s inherited guilt resulting in damnation without baptism was novel. Tran conveniently omits Tertullian’s problematic line for an apostolic command for infant baptism. Tertullian was the FIRST ECF to discuss infant baptism. Tertullian disapproved of an ‘innocent’ infant being baptized. Personal faith in Christ is required. He cites Mat. 19:14

The Lord does indeed say, "Forbid them not to come unto me." Let them come, then, while they are growing up; let them come while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become [Christians](#) when they have become able to [know](#) Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the remission of [sins](#)?

(Tertullian, *De baptismo* 18. He refutes a key verse (Matt. 19:14) utilized centuries later to support paedobaptism.

In fact, on page 174, Wilson claimed Augustine in 420 AD "replies with his allegorized John 3:5, declaring water baptism as essential for salvation, even in sinless newborns." He said Augustine's view was "novel John 3:5 proof text."

A fellow catholic, Vincentius Victor, had rejected Augustine's novel claim that innocent unbaptized infants were damned; and, logically concluded that God was unjust if he placed newborn souls into damned bodies (Nat. orig. 1.10). Augustine replies with his allegorized John 3.5, declaring water baptism as essential for salvation, even in sinless newborns. Therefore, Augustine must reverse his prior explanation of the thief's salvation (Nat. orig. 1.12). Faith no longer suffices; instead, baptism in blood (martyrdom) explains the thief's salvation. When Vincentius points to the thief entering paradise without baptism, Augustine repeats his novel John 3.5 proof text. "Quomodo ergo erit in Dei Patris domo non baptizatus, cum Deum patrem habere non possit nisi renatus?" (2.14). Using John 3.5 as his first scriptural defense (Nat. orig.1.1), it remains foundational, yet the Catholic scholar Redmond doubts it. Three times in two paragraphs Augustine repeats his John 3.5 proof text, claiming it as the definitive passage thundered by Christ himself, proving that infants require baptism.

When Augustine accuses Vincentius of believing in original sin while denying the necessity of regeneration through water baptism for infants (2.17), he simultaneously accuses Ambrose who taught the same thing. His proof texts of Rom 5.18 and Mark 16.16 presuppose inherited guilt. This causes the "damnationem parvuli" who die without the remission of Augustinian original sin through baptism (2.17-18),

With all due respect ([disingenuous](#)), it's Wilson whose view of John 3:5 water as physical birth is both novel and allegorical. And it is complete whole sale revisionist history to claim Augustine invented baptismal salvation and John 3:5 as proof text of that out of Manicheanism and Gnosticism when 1) no father prior to Augustine denied baptismal salvation and John 3:5 view of it and 2) Gnostics were the ones who rejected baptismal salvation and John 3:5 as proof text of that and were condemned for both by pre-Augustine fathers.

Pre-Augustine fathers on John 3:5 as baptismal rebirth and salvation include these examples (among many):

Justin's First Apology, Chapter 61: "Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit,

they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. John 3:5”

Irenaeus’ Fragment 34: “And dipped himself, says [the Scripture], seven times in Jordan. 2 Kings 5:14 It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [it served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: Unless a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. John 3:5”

Tertullian’s A Treatise on the Soul chapter 41, “Therefore, when the soul embraces the faith, being renewed in its second birth by water and the power from above, then the veil of its former corruption being taken away, it beholds the light in all its brightness. It is also taken up (in its second birth) by the Holy Spirit, just as in its first birth it is embraced by the unholy spirit.”

Ambrose’s On the Mysteries: “20. Therefore read that the three witnesses in baptism, the water, the blood, and the Spirit, 1 John 5:7 are one, for if you take away one of these, the Sacrament of Baptism does not exist. For what is water without the cross of Christ? A common element, without any sacramental effect. Nor, again, is there the Sacrament of Regeneration without water: For except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:5 Now, even the catechumen believes in the cross of the Lord Jesus, wherewith he too is signed; but unless he be baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot receive remission of sins nor gain the gift of spiritual grace.”

Tran’s Straw Man Argument discusses only water baptismal regeneration, NOT Augustine’s novel inherited damnation from Adam’s guilt requiring water baptism for innocent infants.

On Abraham 2.11.84 – unbaptized infants avoid punishment but do not enter the kingdom

Ken Wilson did the same thing to the fathers in regards to texts like Psalm 51:5 and to original sin in general to falsely accuse Augustine of novelties.

On page 160 of Augustine’s Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to “Non-free Free Will”, Wilson wrote:

“Augustine accurately depicts scripture’s assessment of all persons, even the most godly, as remaining sinners. But applying this to newborns, he reverses his prior teaching and insists on a novel (for Christians) interpretation of Job 14:4-5 (and Ps.51.7). Was he unaware of the ancient use of hyperbole in regard to vitrium? Horace, whose works he had read (C.mend.28; S. 2.6; ep.1.7), utilized hyperbole to express the pervasiveness of human vices, particularly as beginning from birth (S. Q. Hoarti Flacci 1.68). Also, since newborns are incapable of talking or telling lies, even Ps.57.4 uses hyperbole (cf. John 21.25). Citing Eph 2.3, he assumes Augustinian original sin (cf. p.261). Even his own theology allows Ps 51.7 to mean David’s mother committed sin by sensually enjoying sexual intercourse during David’s conception. By using allegory for his major premise and de-contextualizing multiple scriptures, he concludes his novel theory of God’s wrath damning persons from an inherited reatus of concupiscence.”

Note several ironies here. Wilson loved to poison the well against Augustine and his spiritual

heirs by playing the we must reject his views since they were novel and had pagan roots. But here, he said Augustine should have relied on pagan sources like Horace to understand Scriptures that according to Wilson must be read in hyperbolic way.

This leads to the other irony: while criticizing Augustine for not taking the Scriptural texts in a hyperbolic way like pagans (as in Horace) do, rather than see texts like Psalm 51:5 as literal, he turned around and claimed Augustine was using allegory for his views of such biblical texts. Seriously? Wilson totally contradicted himself there to slam Augustine.

Job was not a pagan. King David wrote Ps.51 that I quoted – David was not a pagan. David wrote Ps. 57.4 that I pointed out obviously uses hyperbole (newborn babies can't speak lies since they cannot speak.) This is obvious hyperbole by King David a few Psalms later. I noted Augustine's citation of Eph.2:3. So I have one introductory pagan whose works Augustine had read (by his own admission) along with four scriptures and I am falsely accused of "he said Augustine should have relied on pagan sources like Horace to understand Scriptures." I did not say that. Tran engaged in blatantly dishonest libel – written defamation.

Besides all that, the claims of the later Augustine (or after 411 AD) having novel views of such texts is also inaccurate. In addition, the claim the early Augustine denied such views of texts like Psalm 51:5 is totally inaccurate as well.

Tran accuses me of inaccuracy yet does not even find a single ECF that believes Ps.51 refers to damnable guilt at birth inherited from Adam. Why – because not one ECF did. Tran is the one who is "totally inaccurate." More libel.

For starters, consider what Wilson on page 70 wrote on Origen's views long before Augustine on Psalm 51:5:

"Celsus apparently taught some type of human sinfulness with guilt upon birth in contrast to the Christian teaching of moral innocence. Origen acknowledges that some biblical passages (e.g. Ps. 51) might appear to affirm such pagan ideas, but he denies any guilt for sin at birth (Cels.7.50). Indeed, the sin nature enters humans through physical birth (Hom. Lev.8.3, 12.4; Comm.Rom.5.9; Cels.7.50)."

Here is what Origen wrote in Against Celsus Book 7, Chapter 50: "Celsus has not explained how error accompanies the becoming, or product of generation; nor has he expressed himself with sufficient clearness to enable us to compare his ideas with ours, and to pass judgment on them. the prophets, who have given some wise suggestions on the subject of things produced by generation, tell us that a sacrifice for sin was offered even for new-born infants, as not being free from sin. They say, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me; also, They are estranged from the womb; which is followed by the singular expression, They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies."

Contrary to what Wilson claimed, Origen 1) did not suggest that Celsus (who denied the Christian faith altogether) held to we are born sinful with guilt upon birth as such "pagan" idea

and 2) Origen did not claim passages appear to teach such “pagan ideas” but said those passages actually such ideas Wilson deemed “pagan.” He said the prophets taught that a sacrifice for sin was offered for even infants since even they were not free from sin. Then he quoted Psalm 51:5 and 58:3 interpreting in the way that saw them as literally saying infants are not free from sin and need sacrifice for sin. I argue this was due to the blood from the Jewish mother giving birth requiring purification. The infant was not guilty of Adam’s sin and damned as a result. Damnably inherited guilt from Adam is absent! Tran wrongly assumes it in eisegesis.

But that’s not the only writing Wilson in the two sentences quoted from book badly misrepresented Origen on.

I did not misrepresent Origen: Tran misrepresented my writings. More libel.

In the latter’s Homily on Leviticus 8.3, Origen said,

“But if it pleases you to hear what other saints also might think about this birthday, hear David speaking, ‘In iniquity I was conceived and in my sins my mother brought me forth,’ showing every soul which is born in flesh is polluted by the filth ‘of iniquity of sin’; and for this reason we can say what we already have recalled above, ‘No one is pure from uncleanness even if his life is only one day long.’ To these things can be added the reason why it is required, since the baptism is given for the forgiveness of sins, that, according, to the observance of the Church, that baptism also be given to infants; since, certainly, if there were nothing in infants that ought to pertain to forgiveness and indulgence, then the grace of baptism would appear superfluous.”

Not only Origen did not remotely see Psalm 51:5 as hyperbolic but saw them as prooftexts that infants had sins in them at birth that required them to be forgiven of as given in baptism. He took the very view of Psalm 51:5 that Wilson accused Augustine of Manichaean and Gnostic novelty over.

I discuss this passage on page 71. Tran either is incapable of reading it or ignored it:

Origen does not say the mother sacrifices for sin in purification after birth (Lev 12.2), but only notes its similarity to a guilty person sacrificing for sin. Either the physical intrauterine location or conception from the father’s sperm contaminates a newborn. He does not explain what an “uncontaminated body” might be, but that “all who sin are contaminated in the father by whom they were created” (Hom. Lev.8.3.2). He does not state that all become sinners by contamination from the father. Even his allegories demonstrate no evidence for transmission of sin or guilt.

Most importantly, Origen’s Hom. Lc.14.3–5 carefully distinguishes between the birth stain (sorde) and sin (peccato). The fact that even the sinless Jesus required purification upon physical birth proves Origen was not thinking

of a guilt of original sin, but rather some physical stain from the birth process (i.e., blood).

Therefore, originally paedobaptism was the corollary of a Jewish ceremonial cleansing of a birth stain (probably from 'unclean' blood), not a baptism for sin, especially not any original sin with guilt.¹³ This supports Danielou's conclusion: «Cette assimilation du baptême à la circoncision, en milieu judéo-chrétien, est ce qui autorise Oscar Cullmann à penser que le baptême des petits enfants est une coutume judéo-chrétienne.» A large Jewish population resided in ancient North Africa, and sects like the Qumranites, Hemerobaptists, and even John the Baptizer baptized to 'wash away sin.' Both Tertullian and Augustine wrote works against Jews in North Africa. One need not conjecture a missing link between the Encratites and Danielou's theories to discover Jewish-Christian groups who might practice paedobaptism for joining the community of faith by 'washing away sin' in ritual purification.

Consider Origen's Romans 5.9 commentary: "Was a newly born child able to sin? And yet it has a sin for which sacrifices are commanded to be offered, and from which it is denied that anyone is pure, even if his life should be a day long. It has to be believed, therefore, that concerning this David also said what we recorded above, 'in sins my mother conceived me.' For according to the historical narrative no sin of his mother is declared. It is on this account as well that the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism to even little children. For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed were aware in everyone was sin's innate defilement, which needed to be washed away through water and the Spirit."

Observe that Origen 1) denied Psalm 51:5 refers to any sin by David's mother, 2) held to infants had sin guilt that required sacrifice, 3) baptism is needed by infants because they had sin that requires washing away, 4) John 3:5 is baptismal rebirth proof-text for Origen, putting the lie to the claim Augustine invented the idea of the text referring to baptism, rather than physical birth.

Libel again. Tran either is incapable of reading it with understanding or ignored it: Regarding his Romans 5:9 quote, Tran forgot to read pages 74-75 where I discussed this passage at length as an interpolation by a translator.

But apostolic transmission of paedobaptismal sin in our extant Comm. Rom.5 is inconsistent with Origen's very detailed and nonspeculative explanations both in his Comm. Rom. and elsewhere. Consistent with the regula fidei, he always taught a hereditary propensity to sin from Adam, with only personal sin resulting in guilt. Therefore, this is unlikely to be a mere contradiction or alternate possibility. Rather, as a single passing reference which stands inconsistent with the remaining context (by supporting a Gnostic or early Manichaean heresy of universal damnation at birth resulting from Adam's sin), it represents a total reversal of Origen's universal insistence upon free choice. Kelly correctly asserted, "the idea of free will provides the key to Origen's whole system."²⁵ This should engender suspicion. If this part of Comm. Rom.5.9.11 is Origen's genuine work, it would be comparable to reading through Augustine's voluminous corpus then discovering in his *Retractationes* two sentences renouncing Augustinian original sin and validating the Donatists' view of rebaptism. Both scenarios could be considered statistically improbable. Therefore, both Rufinus and Origen are

apparently innocent victims of a biased ‘translator.’

These statements by Origen in those three sources are the exact opposite of what Wilson claimed he held to in regards to whether infants are born sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation for sin guilt. In a span of two sentences in his dissertation, Wilson badly misrepresented three writings by Origen just so he claimed the idea of being born guilty of sin didn't exist until later Augustine out of reverting back to various pagan views.

On page 161, Wilson wrote:

“Augustine’s *circulus in probando* claims Cyprian implicitly believed infants should be baptized for the purpose of expiating Augustinian original sin (*Pecc.merit.3.10*), which Cyprian never states (cf. Ch.3). Augustine correctly relates that even the ‘heretic’ Jovinian believed in original sin as evidenced by Jerome’s reply (*Jov.2*), which Augustine cites at length. Indeed, Jovinian and Jerome used the same scriptures as Augustine to demonstrate traditional original sin, but without Augustine’s damnable *reatus*, which Jerome never taught (*Pecc. merit.3.12*).”

Here’s what Cyprian wrote, “But if anything could hinder men from obtaining grace, their more heinous sins might rather hinder those who are mature and grown up and older. But again, if even to the greatest sinners, and to those who had sinned much against God, when they subsequently believed, remission of sins is granted — and nobody is hindered from baptism and from grace— how much rather ought we to shrink from hindering an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth, who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins— that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another.”

Note the last part where he said that at baptism the infant receives forgiveness of sins that isn't his own sins but “sins of another.” Wilson made a blatantly false assertion to claim no mention of Adam’s sin so that he can claim such a view of bearing Adam’s sin guilt that needs baptismal forgiveness originated from the “Manichaean Gnostic” views of later Augustine.

And he knew this claim to be false since on page 158, he wrote that later Augustine “concludes (per Cyprian) that infants must be baptized for someone else’s sin.”

It also be noted that Cyprian not only held to infants needed baptism to have the sins of Adam (another) forgiven, but also that none of them be lost hence why he argued to baptize as soon as possible after birth rather than wait until the eighth day:

“But in respect of the case of the infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think that one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day, we all thought very differently in our council. For in this course which you thought was to be taken, no one agreed; but we all rather judge that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man. For as the Lord says in His Gospel, The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them, Luke 4:56 as far as we Can, We must strive that, if

possible, no soul be lost.”

Note that Cyprian said to baptize infants as soon as possible after birth so that “no soul be lost.” It is therefore ironic and rich that Wilson accused Augustine (falsely) on page 230 of misrepresenting Cyprian here “since no mention can be found of a soul’s damnation in Cyprian’s epistle.” Another key omission by Wilson from what Cyprian so he can trash Augustine.”

On pages 79-81 I discuss Cyprian’s Epistle 64 which Tran did not bother to cite.

In Ep.64, Cyprian and sixty-six colleagues outline ten reasons for Fidus to baptize infants prior to the eighth day of circumcision.

- 1.) All should be admitted to the mercy and grace of Christ (Luke 4.56).
- 2.) All humans are alike and equal since all are made by God.
- 3.) All have the same equality of the divine gift.
- 4.) Neither the Spirit nor baptism are given by measure.
- 5.) God accepts neither the person nor the age.
- 6.) Infants are pure at birth since “to the pure everything is pure” (Titus 1.15) and “no man should be called common or unclean” (Acts 10.28).
- 7.) Newborns are given to us immediately from God’s own hands.
- 8.) Spiritual circumcision has replaced physical circumcision of the eighth day.
- 9.) If the greatest sinners can be forgiven then infants should easily be forgiven.
- 10.) The crying of newborns indicates their desire for help and request for divine mercy.

Where do read inherited guilt unto damnation in this? It does not exist. Tran commits eisegesis. Cyprian does not mention Adam’s sin, inherited sin, or guilt – only a birth according to the fleshly contagion. Cyprian pronounces the newborn given directly from God as pure at birth. The hereditary contagion seems much less serious than personal sin (the infant approaches much more easily). Nevertheless, a newborn contracts something by birth related to the “ancient death.” This matches Origen’s contemporaneous assessment of paedobaptism as removing the stain of entering a physical body, without sin or damnable guilt (e.g., even the newborn Jesus still required a sacrifice). For Cyprian and sixty-six colleagues to give ten reasons for infant baptism but omit the most important one – that unbaptized infants are damned from original sin – should be considered incredibly incompetent, if they believed it.

This is what happens when a wanna-be-scholar like Tran attempts to understand scholarly writings without knowing the Latin and Greek languages, has no training in Patristics, and is more committed to his own biased view rather than doing legitimate research.

It wasn’t just Cyprian that was misrepresented by Wilson on page 161 so that he can malign Augustine. Contrary to what Wilson claimed, Jerome did take the side of (later) Augustine on original sin.

Contrary to what Wilson said, Jerome did side with Augustine on original sin. Jerome in his later

years wrote in *Against the Pelagians Book 3*:

“And if you object that some are spoken of who did not sin, you must understand that they did not sin in the same way as Adam did by transgressing God's command in Paradise. But all men are held liable either on account of their ancient forefather Adam, or on their own account. He that is an infant is released in baptism from the chain which bound his father. He who is old enough to have discernment is set free from the chain of his own or another's sin by the blood of Christ.”

Where does Tran find inherited guilt unto damnation? It is not here. What is the infant's “chain that bound his father?.” According to all of the prior ECFs., it was physical death, moral weakness, and the sin nature/sin propensity, NOT GUILT unto damnation. Tran reads this into the text when it is not there.

On page 175, Wilson wrote,

“When Augustine accuses Vincentius of believing in original sin while denying the necessity of regeneration through water baptism for infants, he simultaneously accuses Ambrose who taught the same thing.”

Really? Let's see what Augustine's mentor and bishop of Milan wrote in *On Abraham*, 2.84:

“Unless a man be born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Surely, He exempts none, not the infant, not one hindered by any necessity: but although they may have a hidden immunity to punishments, I know not whether they have the honour of the Kingdom.”

Besides seeing John 3:5 as proof-text for baptismal saving necessity, even for infants (contrary to Wilson claiming that originated with Augustine), he argued the following page in 2.81 linking circumcision to baptism and showing infants have sin guilt that baptism needs to forgive and call them from:

Tran is in error because he does not know Latin. I wrote about Ambrose: “The famous scholar Chadwick confirms this observation. ‘Ambrose here, as in S.iii.1.7, connects baptism with the removal of actual, personal sin, and regards the washing of 62 Rondet (1898; repr., 1966), 146; mistakenly citing *De mysteriis* 31–32 and *De sacramentis* 3.5–7 as evidence for inherited sin by conflating foot washing with baptism. the feet as having a similar efficacy with regard to transmitted (or hereditary) sin.’” 63

There is the same distinction in both passages between actual sin with its guilt (*culpa*) and transmitted (or hereditary) sin. The guilt of actual sin is cleansed in baptism. But there remains ‘the poison poured over Adam's feet,’ and this survives in his descendants, and needs to be cleansed by a ‘reinforcement of sanctification,’ supplied by the feet-washing, which thus has sacramental significance. [...] Ambrose in all the above passages does not appear to regard inherited sin as guilt.64

“No age should be devoid of tutelage, because none is devoid of guilt. Even a baby is to be called back from sin, lest he be stained by the infection of idolatry, and lest he become accustomed to worship an idol and fondly kiss an image, to disobey his father’s will, to offend against piety. At the same time, lest anyone be haughty, in that he seems to himself to be righteous, Abraham is ordered to be circumcised. Therefore, neither an old proselyte nor a home-born baby, because every age is subject to sin, and therefore every age is fit to receive the Sacrament.”

All these on top of the fact contrary to Wilson’s claims, fathers such as Marius Victorinus (on Philippians 1:29), Jerome (on Ephesians 2:8 and John 6:44) and Chrysostom (on Ephesians 2:8) did see faith as a gift of God, all prior to post 411 Augustine. (Not to mention Victorinus’s unconditional election views well before Augustine.) Time and space won’t allow for further quotes from them, but check out the references.

My book specifically addresses Tran’s misunderstanding of faith wherein non-scholars erroneously find faith as a gift from God in Jerome, Victorinus, and Chrysostom and assume it means what Augustine meant – it did not. See pages 208-209. Of course, Tran missed that also.

Tran’s fifty paragraph fake review exposes that he did not read my book, or was not capable of understanding my book, or ignored my valid points in favor of his own biased and unscholarly opinion. His concluding sentence repeats his illegal libel against me.

“Wilson’s dissertation was thoroughly dishonest and written as a smear piece not only against Augustine but all who don’t fit his age of accountability freewill Baptist views.”

I never discussed an age of accountability and I am not a Freewill Baptist. Tran commits dishonest libel *ad nauseum*.