This paper aims to place the argument of Gregory's Contra Eunomium III 3 into historical perspective. This text teaches us a great deal about the quite different approaches taken by Eunomius and Gregory to the mystery of Christ and the salvation he brings. To begin with a provisional description, for Eunomius, salvation requires that the “one Lord” through whom all things were created be identified in every respect with Jesus, whereas for Gregory, salvation is the story of “union of the man with the divine” in Christ (ἕνωσιν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πρὸς τὸ θεῖον) (III 3,69).¹ That this is a story, I hope to underscore.

Gregory’s Christology is notoriously complicated; he has appeared to more than one commentator to move from highly “divisive” or “dualistic” passages to “monophysite” passages without comment on how it all holds together.² However, at least from the perspective of CE III 3, what we see in Gregory is not outright contradiction but rather an intertwining of diverse strands, some of which Gregory has inherited from his sources.³

¹ Unless differences are noted, I have followed the translation by Stuart G. Hall. For the importance of the language of “union”, see J.-R. Bouchet, “Le Vocabulaire de l’union et du rapport des natures chez saint Grégoire de Nyssse”, Revue Thomiste 68 (1968) 533–582, at 534–38.
³ The complexity of Gregory’s Christology can be illustrated by noting that, in the Eranistes dialogue of Theodoret, written around AD 447, Gregory seems to have influenced both the Orthodox speaker—CE III 3 and other texts are cited in the patristic florilegium supporting his account—and the “Eutychian” speaker Eranistes, especially in the latter’s argument that, after the passion, the humanity of Christ is through mixture made Lord. For Eranistes advocating this view, see Eranistes 2 (ed. G. H. Ettlinger, Oxford 1975, 146–151). He changes his position from his earlier statement that this occurs at the incarnation; though see already Eranistes 2 (Ettlinger 128). For Theodoret’s citation of CE III 3,43–44, see Eranistes 2 (Ettlinger 128). In the citation, Theodoret omits a more “monophysite” clause: “by that combination [the ‘right hand of God’] making him also what by nature it is itself”. CE III 3 is also cited in the Florilegia to books 1 (III 3,64; Ettlinger 106) and 3 (III 3,65; Ettlinger 241).
The labels “divisive” and “dualistic” have been used to describe Basil’s and Gregory’s Christology. This interpretation began with Eunomius. For Eunomius, Basil’s distinction of theology and economy implies a certain embarrassment on Basil’s part regarding the kenosis and suffering of Christ as well as an actual division of two Christs. But not all distinctions are separations or divisions. As we will see, Gregory’s Christology is clearly not “divisive”, and I will suggest that a better label for it is “dual-focus” Christology, with some passages referring to the Word in his fleshly, human state and others referring to him with God from before the ages. Yet, as we shall see, this “dual-focus” obtains only before Christ’s resurrection and glorification, after which it is inappropriate to distinguish Christ’s humanity from his divinity.4

*CE* III 3 is devoted to the interpretation of Peter’s words in *Acts* 2,36—“God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”5 While Gregory is ostensibly merely defending Basil’s understanding of the passage, he at the same time adds significant new elements to it. Some of what he adds can be accounted for by placing Gregory into a broader anti-Homoian and anti-Eunomian tradition that had emerged alongside Basil in the roughly two decades from the late 350’s to the death of Basil.

This study will proceed in four stages. First, I offer an overview of Eunomius’ Christology in the fragment preserved by Gregory in III 3, and summarize his charges against Basil. Then I will discuss at some length the interpretation of *Acts* 2,36 in anti-Eunomian tradition prior to Gregory. Third, I will turn briefly to Gregory’s Christology in works roughly contemporaneous with *CE* III. Finally, I will comment upon *CE* III 3 itself.

1  **Eunomius’ Charges Against Basil**

In III 3, Gregory preserves a lengthy fragment of Eunomius’ *Apologiae*, running to 133 lines in the GNO edition. In the fragment, Eunomius also lodges

4 An important study of *CE* III 3 which rightly emphasizes the paschal transformation of Christ’s humanity can be found in B. Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse*, Namur 1994, esp. 241–56. As will be evident, there are problems with Pottier’s claim that in *CE* III 3, “mixture” does not mean the “absorption” of the risen human in Christ into the divine. In particular, it is striking that Pottier can cite no passage in *CE* III 3 to justify his reading. His strongest evidence is Basil, *Ep*. 261,3!