The stated purpose of *CE* III 6 is to establish the Son’s equal eternity with the Father. Judgment on the reality—or lack thereof—of the Son’s eternal existence proved to be, in the fourth century, a decisive standard by which the fullness of the Son’s divinity was measured. Alexander of Alexandria’s declaration of the Son’s full eternity triggered Arius’s doctrinal revolt against his hierarch. I believe that the controversy over the catchphrase, “There was when he was not” is a controversy waged using a slogan which all sides recognized as a token expressing the fundamental issue at stake. Whether one party or another actually used the slogan was irrelevant in the face of the real question of the Son’s eternal existence as compared to God the Father’s. The doctrine that “the Son is not truly eternal as the Father is” is a belief that Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Acacius, and Eunomius all have in common—a fundamental, non-negotiable, insight. Gregory shares with Alexander of Alexandria and Athanasius (and many others) the belief that the Son is truly eternal as the Father is—likewise as a fundamental, non-negotiable, insight: “Eternal Father, eternal Son”.

The means by which Gregory accomplishes his purpose of establishing the Son’s equal eternity with the Father is predominantly through arguments of inner-Trinitarian causality. In the fourth century positive statements of Trinitarian doctrine using aetiological models was an accepted, traditional way of expressing Trinitarian theology. Moreover, Eunomius’s argument for the non-eternal existence of the Son is given in terms of causality: in his *Apology* Eunomius argues that the energy that produces the Son is temporary, with a beginning and end, and for this reason no product of that energy can be eternal. (The understanding that an effect ceases to exist when its cause ceases to exist is known as *synectic*: even prior to Eunomius, it is tied, as I have shown elsewhere, to a strong use of “energeia”).

Richard Vaggione has argued that Book III of Gregory’s *Contra Eunomium* engages the third book of Eunomius’s response to Basil’s criticism of the *Apology* (in his *CE* II 1–29). In book three of his later work Eunomius develops and defends his original arguments as they begin in c12 of the *Apology*; Part 6 of Gregory’s Third Book is in response to Eunomius’s recent elaboration of

---

the argument he originally offered in Apology 15–17. In Apology 15 Eunomius argued that the Son is not begotten out of nothing or from underlying matter, nor is the Son from God’s essence, but the Son is the product of God’s will alone. In Apology 16 Eunomius argued that terms of production are not attributed to the Father as they are attributed to human production. In Apology 17 Eunomius argued that God is called “Maker” in a sense that excludes the need for pre-existent material for Him to build with; and that God is called “Father” in a sense that excludes the presence of passion in the act of begetting. In making this argument in c17 Eunomius uses analogos for the only time in the Apology in order to characterize the relationship between God’s activity of Father and human activity of father, or God being called “Spirit” as the angels are called “spirits”. Gregory’s argument in Part 6, of course, makes strong use of his notion of analogical predication. However, while Vaggione’s thesis does indeed reveal a proportionate congruency among Eunomius’s Apology 15–17, Basil’s Contra Eunomium II.11–13, a section of the reconstructed third book of Eunomius’s Second Apology, and Gregory’s Part VI of his Against Eunomius, in the end Vaggione’s thesis is not borne out overall by consistent cases of proportionate congruencies between Gregory’s book III and Eunomius’s Apology. However, from Vaggione’s thesis I draw the working conclusion that a proper reading of Gregory’s Book Three requires looking through his text into three texts that lie behind (or beneath) it, each such text penetrating into the next: Eunomius’s original Apology, Basil’s Contra Eunomium, and Eunomius’s Second Apology.

In CE III 6 Gregory offers a number of arguments that modern scholars recognize as characteristically and distinctively “Gregorian”: for example, Gregory’s list of the four senses of “generate” and their analogical application to Trinitarian aetiology; his description of the relationship between Father and Son as a “koinonia”; his division of all being into uncreated and created (as opposed to the polar ontological categories of uncaused and caused that go back to Parmenides); his description of the divine life as adiastemic; and his strong assimilation of God’s productive capacity to his being. I would add to this list that in this work Gregory gives the definitive pro-Nicene exegesis of Heb 1,3. Furthermore, I will suggest, at the end of this essay, that in CE III 6 Gregory employs a previously unremarked upon rhetorical-polemical strategy for dealing with those bishops who prior to 381 had been “on the wrong side”—a strategy of his own making.

To begin properly, we should notice that Part Six of Book Three represents Gregory returning to the more Trinitarian subject matter of the first two parts

---

3 Vaggione’s hypothesis is subject to verification or falsification.