Time, Eternity, and the Generation of the Son: 
*Contra Eunomium III 7*

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1 Introduction

With only 23 pages in Jaeger’s *GNO* -edition book 7 is one of the shortest of *CE* III. Thematically it continues the reflection of the previous book about the begetting of the Son and what this means for his relationship to the Father. In *CE* III 7 especially the time-issue is central: Gregory is adamant in underlining that there is no ‘before’ or ‘after’ within the deity; that there is no distance whatsoever between Father and Son.

Just like other parts of *CE* III, this book too has a strong refutational character. Essentially, Gregory starts from quotations, paraphrases or brief summaries of Eunomius’ *Apologia apologiae* to demonstrate in great detail why his opponent is wrong. The structure of Gregory’s argumentation is therefore to a considerable extent determined by this ‘dialogue’ with Eunomius.1 This results in an overall meandering structure which is not so easy to follow. The continuous back and forth between the two opponents is reinforced by the frequent use of oppositional logic. Very often Gregory’s argumentation proceeds on the basis of presenting two mutually exclusive alternatives so that acceptance of one automatically results in a rejection of the other.

With only about a dozen of instances,2 Scriptural quotations and allusions are used in *CE* III 7 less frequently than in other parts of *CE* III and really much too minimal to influence the structure of this part of his work. No extensive interpretations of key-verses here but a rather sparing use of biblical

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borrowings. Usually they fit and reinforce the argumentation but one doesn't get the feeling that it is his major source of inspiration.

There is not so much room for Scripture in III 7 but there is, in line with his elder brother Basil, much more attention to polemical, dismissive language, against Eunomius in person, or against him and his supporters. In some longer passages Gregory gives his polemical language and creativity free rein. As we will see, the opening of III 7 provides a beautiful example but also later on one cannot but admire Gregory’s polemical ingenuity. What to think of a passage such as the following: “Who is so free from the concerns of life that he can devote himself to listening to the nonsense of our opponents’ words and our battle with nonsensical things? Yet, because for those seized with impiety, the deceit, like a deep and wash-resistant dye, is imprinted in the depth of their hearts, let us apply just a little more effort to our argument, in case we can cleanse their minds of this evil stain of theirs”. Thus, he denounces his opponent’s views as nonsense while at the same time making the transition to the next part of his argument. Something similar happens at III 7,55, where Gregory is making the transition to the final part of III 7: “The shadow-boxing of our adversaries about the term ‘unbegottenness’, vainly based on non-existence, is a quite futile error. However, if there is further need to drag into the open the whole absurdity of the book, let a little more time be given to the debate”.

Besides these more extensive examples, placed at key points in the flow of the argument, this strategy of denunciation and rejection is also sustained by the use of a polemical terminology throughout the writing: Eunomius’ “new philosophy”, or, ironically, his “scientific method”; Eunomius is “the wordsmith”, he is exhibiting “lack of original thoughts”. All of this is not new and it is also present in the other books of the CE III but it is good to underline it once more. After all, this polemical language helps to create and support the unquestioned proposition that he (Gregory) is representing the “correct”

3 See M. Cassin, L’écriture de la controverse, 57–111 for a systematic survey.
4 CE III 7,24: τίς γὰρ τοσοῦτον εὔσχολος ἐκ τῶν τοῦ βίου φροντιδῶν ὡς ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἑαυτὸν δοῦναι τῇ ἀκροᾶσει τῆς τε ματαιότητος τῶν ὑπεναντίων λόγων καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας πρὸς τὰ μάταια πράγματα μάχης; ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ τοῖς προειλημμένοις τῇ ἀσεβείᾳ καθάπερ τις δευσοποιὸς βαρὴ καὶ δυσέκνιπτος ἡ ἀπάτη καὶ διὰ βάθους ταῖς καρδίαις ἐγκέκαυται, μικρὸν ἐτὶ τό λόγῳ προσδιατρίψωμεν, εἰ πως δυνηθείημεν τῆς πονηρᾶς αὐτῶν ταύτης κηλίδος τὰς ψυχὰς ἀπορρύψαι (GNO II 223,18–26).
5 CE III 7,54–55: καὶ μάτην διαπλανᾶται τῶν πολεμούντων ἢμεν ἢ περί το τῆς ἀγεννησίας σκιαμαχία διὰ τῶν ἀνυπάρκτων κενεμβατοῦσα. Μᾶλλον δὲ εἰ χρή πάσαν εἰς τό ἐμφανεῖς ἀγαγεῖν τὴν ἄτοπαν τοῦ λόγου, μικρὸν ἐτι συγχωρηθῆτω προσδιατρίψαι τῷ θεωρήματι (GNO II 234,6–11).
6 Respectively CE III 7,7 (τὴν νέαν σοφίαν [GNO II 217,13]); CE III 7,22 (ἐκ τῆς τεχνικῆς ἐφόδου [GNO II 222,21]); CE III 7,7 (τὸ λογογράφου [GNO II 217,15–16]; also in CE III 7,8 [GNO II 217,20,25] and CE III 7,37 [GNO II 228,19]); CE III 7,8 (ἡ κλοπή [GNO II 217,22]).