PART TWO

THE SHAPE OF HILARY’S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY
CHAPTER FIVE

EXEGETING SCRIPTURE

In Hilary’s thought world, in order to have a right conception about the relationship between the Father and the Son we have to read Scripture correctly. But in order to read Scripture correctly we have to properly understand the relationship between the Father and the Son. Hilary’s attempt to explore the interplay of these two dynamics is the driving factor of his mature Trinitarian theology in *De Trinitate*. Everything he does in Books 4–12 of *De Trinitate* is directed towards establishing a correct exegesis of controversial passages of Scripture. This has, of course, been true of much of Hilary’s thought, especially the early books of *De Fide*. However, in *De Trinitate* Hilary’s exegetical strategies take on new characteristics. In the experience of his exile, his relationship with the Homoiousians (and Homoians), and the writing of both *De Fide* and *De Synodis*, Hilary has learned which Scripture passages are at issue in the current controversy and why they are so controversial. He has also learned new strategies for dealing with these controversial passages, and it is these strategies that I will examine in this chapter. The goal here is not to provide a comprehensive account of Hilary’s exegesis. This has been done ably by others. Instead, I want to examine the

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1 For an overview of Hilary’s exegetical method, see the posthumously published work of Jean Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers: Disciple et témoin de la vérité* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 2005). Though useful, Doignon focuses largely Hilary’s commentary on the Psalms, which he wrote well after the time period being studied here. The standard treatment of Hilary’s exegesis is Charles Kannengiesser, “L’exégèse d’Hilaire,” in *Hilaire et son Temps* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1969): 127–142. Kannengiesser does not treat Hilary’s exegesis in *De Trinitate* in and of itself, but he does offer insight into Hilary’s preferred method of dealing with long sections of the Biblical text, which is exactly what Hilary does in *De Trinitate*. Kannengiesser identifies two “hermeneutical rules” in Hilary’s scripture commentaries, both of which seem to be operative in *De Trinitate*. The first rule is that, “Le sens d’un texte biblique doit être cherché dans le respect de la lettre même de ce texte.” In other words, the exegete must look first to the intention of the author, which requires investigating a passage in its “textual” (“textuelle”) context. Hilary employs this rule throughout *De Trinitate* by examining a controversial passage in its broader context, with the goal of ascertaining what the author originally meant. This is how he treats the John passages here. The second rule states that, “Le sens d’un texte biblique doit être cherché à la lumière de la Révelation globale du mystère...