

#1) “Reminiscing on the Past, Present, and Future of the IGNTP”

SBL 2023

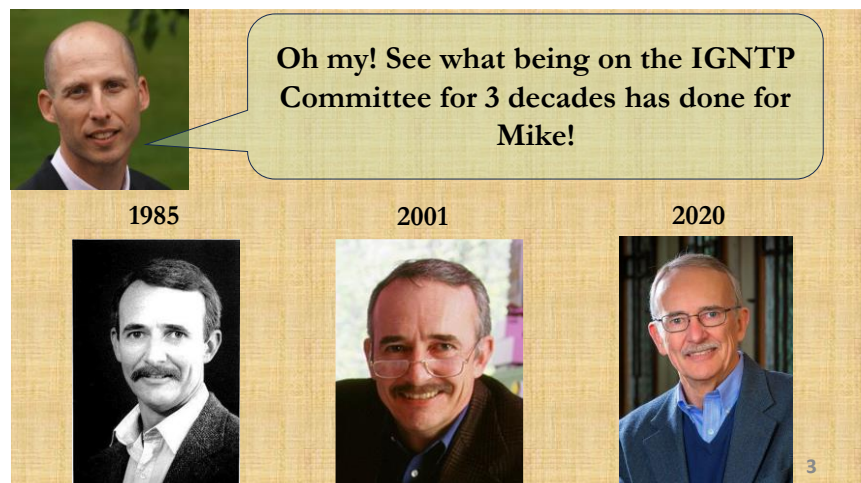
Dr. Michael W. Holmes

1. In 1995, the New Testament Textual Criticism section sponsored a session devoted to the IGNTP. Eldon Epp spoke on the history of the project, Bill Petersen evaluated the Lucan volumes, Bruce Morrill spoke on computers, Paul McReynolds described “where we are now,” and I was asked to consider “*where we are headed*: prospects and possibilities.”

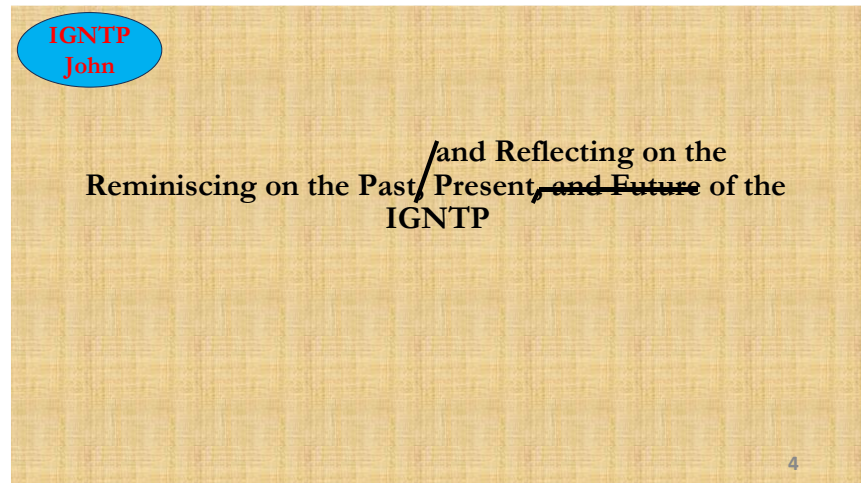
#2) At the time, I declined the invitation to prognosticate, on the grounds that I was neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but a herdsman, and spoke instead about “challenges and possibilities.”



#3) Now here we are, twenty-eight years later, and of the 1995 group only Bruce and I are still present. Once again, I have again been invited to speak, this time about the past, present, and future of the IGNTP.



- #4) Though I have long ceased to be a herdsman, I am still no prophet or futurist. So I propose to review what I hope are some interesting and/or illuminating aspects of the “past” of the IGNTP John project and how that history has shaped its present circumstances.¹



- #5) 2. Eldon Epp, in his 1995 essay, characterized the four decades of the Lucan era of the IGNTP as **“a time of good intentions, good will, and good work, hampered, however, by uncertain financial support, lost opportunities for international cooperation, and unexpected delay after unexpected delay.”**²

I suggest his four points are worth revisiting with regard to the Johannine era of the Project.

- #6) 2.1: Let us start with Epp’s **last point**: his mention of **“unexpected delay after unexpected delay.”** That certainly was the case with the Luke volumes, in part because the IGNTP Committees set so many target dates:

In 1950, the NA Comm “set 1954 as the time when the Luke volume will go to press.” In 1955, it was thought that the volume would go to press in late 1957. In 1958, the first volume was expected to go to press in 1960.³ In 1964, a provisional model of the proposed apparatus, covering six verses (Luke 20:1-6), was published.⁴ In 1966, , a “tentative date” of 1971 for the completion of Luke was suggested.⁵ In 1971, a full-time editor was appointed

¹ The story of the founding and first 40 years of the IGNTP, which culminated in the publication of the 2-volume apparatus for the Gospel of Luke, has been told often and well, and some part of that story will be the focus of a paper later in this session. Furthermore, my own involvement with the IGNTP post-dates the publication of the Lucan volumes. So, I will focus on the years since the publication of the second Lucan volume in 1987.

² Epp, “Essays,” 437.

³ Epp. *Essays*, 447-448.

⁴ So Birdsall, *ANRW* 26.1, 183; Epp, however, places this in 1965 (*Essays*, 450).

⁵ Epp. *Essays*, 454 (at a joint meeting of the NA and British Exec Comms).

for a three-year term to bring the Luke project to completion by 1974.⁶ But as we all know, it was not until 1984 that vol. 1 was published, with vol. 2 following in 1987.

There certainly was “delay after unexpected delay” for many understandable reasons (including lack of funding and total reliance on volunteer labor), but also because so many unrealistic target dates were proposed.

Now let’s pick up the story of the IGNTP John volume.⁷ In early 1987, the British committee re-organized itself, and the North American Committee began to discuss whether to do so. Eldon Epp, who had joined the project around 1970, spoke for many when he indicated that he “did not wish” to sign up for another 40-yr project ... But “if computer programs were available or could be devised to assist in collations and to record and to maintain the textual data in ways that could usefully manipulate them for our purposes,” he was willing to “support the continuation of the Project.” Subsequently in November 1988 the North American committee was officially reformulated, the two committees agreed to a division of labor, and work on the John project commenced. One change from the previous committees: no one was projecting a possible completion date!

Instead, working groups within the Committees identified intermediate goals and went to work. In this way a volume of the Johannine papyri was published in 1995, the majuscules volume came out in 2007, and the selection of the MSS to be included in the apparatus of the John volume was completed sometime between 2010 and 2014.⁸

With steady and focused progress such as this, I doubt that anyone involved in the project at that time thought it would take as long to complete the John volumes as it did the Luke volumes—and yet here we are in 2023, 36 years and counting since the project was inaugurated, still awaiting the John volume.

Why so long? Aside from the basic fact that this is an unusually large project in regard to both scale and complexity, two additional factors stand out at the moment:

- (1) Despite grant-winning success that funded some full-time positions and had such a positive impact on the middle stages of the John project, the project still relies rather heavily on volunteer labor.
- (2) At the current advanced stage of the project, there is a limited pool of volunteers who have the necessary expertise or skill necessary to finish the work.

⁶ Epp, *Essays*, 454-455.

⁷ For the following paragraph see Epp, *Essays*, 456-7.

⁸ According to Parker et al. (Holmes FS, p. 288), the process for assessing the initial selection of MSS was still being discussed in late 2010, while the essay describing that process of selection and listing the selected MSS was published in 2015, and thus almost certainly would have been completed by late 2014.

Two examples from the minutes of the most recent⁹ IGntp Committee meeting will illustrate both points:

(1) the data for the Syriac version has been ready to enter for some time, but only this semester has the key person been able to work on this. Once it is finished, then it will be possible to “review all the versional material and citations and incorporate them into the apparatus as appropriate.”

(2) “Entry of the [patristic] citations has not progressed, but” one person “hopes to be able to do some regular work in the coming year.” A second person “has kindly offered to do some work as well, and” the first person “will be helping” the second person “to become familiar with the process.”

In short, in two cases, such a basic function as entering data has held up work on key elements of the editorial process. In such circumstances, it can hardly be a surprise that work towards completion of the Project sometimes moves more slowly than anticipated or hoped.

#7) **2.2:** Turning to the **second** of Epp’s points, he noted that the Luke project was “**hampered ... by uncertain financial support.**” His summary of the early years of the IGntp mentions two grants received by the North American committee: one in 1949 from the Rockefeller Foundation for \$12,500, and one in the early ‘60’s from the Bollingen Foundation for \$15,000--a total of \$27,500 spread over fourteen years).¹⁰

The British Committee received some assistance from the British Academy, which provided “financial support to cover the committee’s operating expenses” but not salaries, except for the years 1971-1974, when it provided a three-year stipend for the executive editor. These grants were not insignificant, but overall were hardly commensurate with the scope of the project. Elliott’s review of those years mentions difficulties on both the American and British side in raising funds; they were, unlike von Soden, unable to persuade a wealthy benefactor to support the project.¹¹

The situation did not change much during the first decade or so of the John project. On the North American side, one committee member contributed \$500 in 1990 to cover the cost of shipping microfilms to transcribers. In 1992 and 1995, the IGntp was the recipient of SBL Research and Publication grants totaling \$6080, and in 2002, Abilene Christian University (the home institution of one of the Committee members) covered a bill for purchasing microfilms in the amount of \$5140—a grand total \$11,220 over 15 years.

The absence of grant income was not for lack of trying. In 1991, for example, I submitted a grant proposal to the NEH for \$135,888. Revised proposals were re-submitted in 1993 and 1994; none were successful.

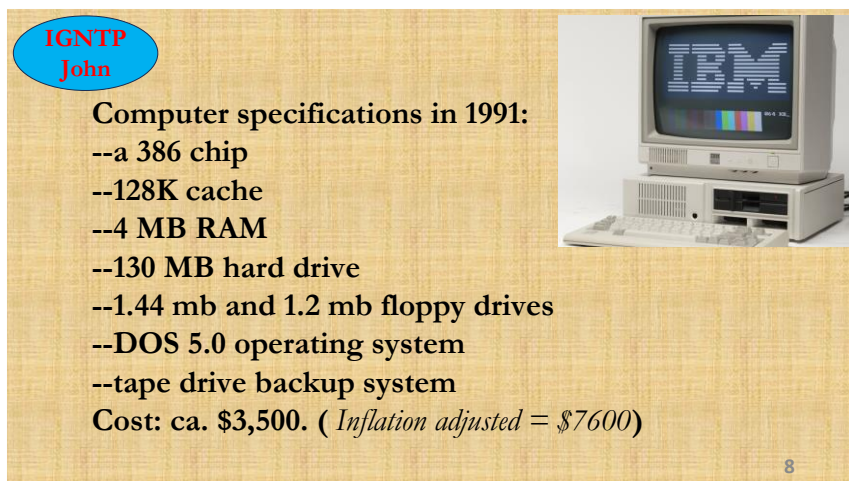
⁹ I.e., November 2023.

¹⁰ Epp, *Essays*, 445-447.

¹¹ JK Elliott, *Essays*, 579.

A Brief Detour:

- #8) Looking back at the first application, 2 points caught my eye. One is the state of computer hardware in 1991: the application budget included the purchase of two IBM-compatible personal computers: 386 chip, 128k cache, 4mb RAM, 130 mb HD, 1.44 and 1.2 mb floppy drives, a DOS 5.0 operating system, and a tape-drive backup system: Price per computer: \$3,446. [*Over \$7600 adjusted for inflation*]



**IGNTP
John**

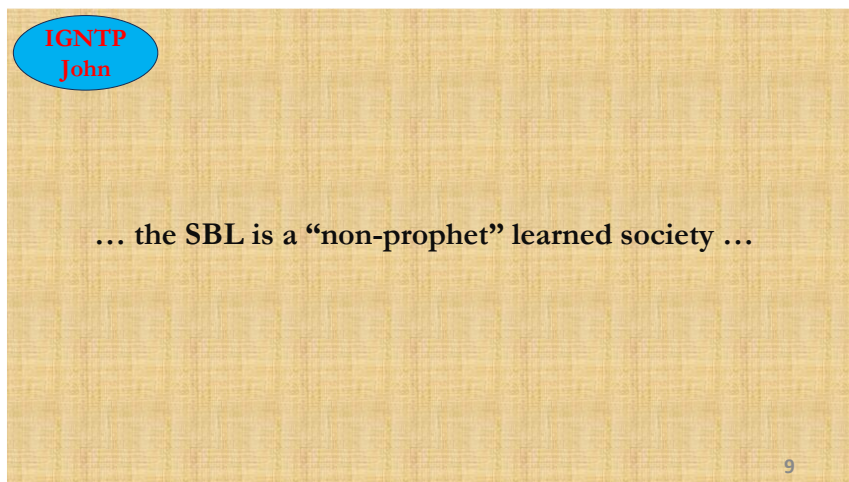
Computer specifications in 1991:

- a 386 chip
- 128K cache
- 4 MB RAM
- 130 MB hard drive
- 1.44 mb and 1.2 mb floppy drives
- DOS 5.0 operating system
- tape drive backup system

Cost: ca. \$3,500. (*Inflation adjusted = \$7600*)

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- #9) The second is the memory of a typo I made in an early draft of the application: when asked to characterize the SBL—which was the sponsoring organization for the IGNTP—I typed that it was a “non-prophet” learned society. (Fortunately, David Lull caught the slip before any damage was done.)



**IGNTP
John**

... the SBL is a “non-prophet” learned society ...

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- #10) **Back to the grants:** beyond the three unsuccessful NEH applications, the minutes are littered with references to the Lilly, Pew, Templeton, and other foundations, each of which was investigated as a possible funding source. A comment from the 2002 Committee minutes, which noted the “lack of

interest” on the part of US foundations in awarding grants,¹² may serve as a desultory summary of the Committee’s largely fruitless efforts over the course of 15 years.

The British Committee, for the first decade or so, did little better, though it did receive some funds from the British Academy to cover operating expenses.¹³ Things changed dramatically, however, following the creation of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (later AHRC) in October 1998. David Parker and his colleagues on the British Committee lost little time in submitting applications for funding, and they proved remarkably talented at winning grants to fund the committee’s work. Indeed, between 2000 and 2010, Parker and his colleagues were awarded 6 AHRB/AHRC grants for various aspects of the IGNTP John project totaling over **£2.5 million**.¹⁴

These grant awards are a major reason for the extraordinary success of the British Committee in making consistent progress on the John volume, and also in developing the software tools and **computational ecosystem** necessary to handle such a large project.

The widely differing results of grant-seeking efforts meant that the “center of gravity” of the IGNTP John project shifted almost entirely to Birmingham, and for good reason. Indeed, one member of the North American committee is recorded in the minutes for 2003 as wondering why the NA committee still existed.¹⁵

One consequence of this shift to Birmingham—a shift that was facilitated by the increasing ease and affordability of trans-Atlantic air travel, and the development of Internet-based means of communication—was that by 2007, the separate North American and British Committees merged into a single international Executive Committee. Form and structure followed the funding, as it were.

#11) 2.3: Let us now turn to the **third** of Epp’s observations about the early decades of the IGNTP—namely, that was that it was a time of “**lost opportunities for international cooperation**.”¹⁶

He mentions two specific opportunities, one involving the pre-history of the IGNTP in the mid-20’s and one in the mid-60’s.¹⁷ Neither, however, bore any fruit. On both occasions, different opinions regarding both goals and methods were primary causes. Some wished to produce a **critical apparatus**,

¹² NA Committee 2002 minutes, point 3.3.2.

¹³ This is an inference drawn from the British Committee minutes for 1987-1996. The minutes regularly include a “Treasurer’s Report,” but the only figure routinely reported is the account balance, not its source(s). E.g., the March 1990 minutes record that “the British Academy’s money would be transferred to the deposit account,” but do not mention the amount involved. For the years 1999-2018 Hugh Houghton reports that the British Academy provided £43,906 to cover operating expenses, and Parker reported another £25,000 in grants to cover the purchase of microfilms of Greek MSS. (email from Houghton Nov. 2, 2023; email from DCP October 31, 2023).

¹⁴ Email from DCP (October 31, 2023), supplemented by an email from Houghton (Nov. 2, 2023).

¹⁵ Ehrman, in 2003 NA mins (3.1) is recorded as asking: what is the point of the NA Comm?

¹⁶ : JKE, in an article in his collected essays (pp. 590, 591, 593), makes a big deal about how he hopes that the potential of collaboration between US, England and Münster will in fact pay off; this concern justifies my attention to this point.

¹⁷ Epp, *Essays*, 438-440, 452; cf. Parker, *Principio* essay.

in which case using the TR as a collating base was unquestionably the most economical and efficient option. Others wished to produce a critical *text*, and to use a critical edition as a collating base. Regional and personality differences also were evident, and the result was the same in both instances—a missed opportunity for collaboration between scholars with strong common interests.

Very early in the formation of the John project, this history was on the minds of those involved. Already in 1989, the North American minutes record a “concern . . . that we attempt to include the Alands in the work,” though nothing seems to have come from this at the time.¹⁸

In the late 1990’s, a new opportunity presented itself, and this time around matters turned out quite differently. Here’s part of that story. In mid-1997, the INTF in Münster published the first fascicle of the *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critica Maior*, which presented the text of James. Plans for such an edition had been sketched in 1967 and announced in 1969, and so in 1997 anticipation and curiosity about the new edition were running high. At that time, I was both chair of the SBL Textual Criticism program committee and the Executive Chair of the North American committee of the IGNTP. When the German Bible Society offered to fly Dr. Barbara Aland to the SBL Annual meeting in San Francisco if I could find a place for her in the program, I quickly and eagerly accepted the offer. I arranged a TC Section session at which she could present the inaugural fascicle of the ECM to an SBL audience, and I made plans for her to meet with the North American committee of the IGNTP.

Knowing about the earlier missed opportunities, I then did what I could to improve the chances for fruitful conversations in San Francisco. I invited David Parker, the British editor and a good friend, to come to San Francisco a day early. I rented a car and took David for a scenic ride across the Golden Gate bridge, over to the coast, and then north to Bodega Bay, where my mother-in-law lived. By prior arrangement, she was expecting us for lunch at her house overlooking the bay and the ocean. After a great meal, David and I cruised back to SF.

Second, I invited Dr. Aland and Dr. Klaus Wachtel (who accompanied her to the meetings) to dinner in San Francisco (at a restaurant recommended by my mother-in-law, of course). I had not previously met either Barbara or Klaus, and all three of us were understandably somewhat nervous for different reasons, but the meal and conversation went well as we got acquainted and talked a bit about the upcoming SBL session and the IGNTP meetings. All in all, a very nice time together, and one that relieved some of their anxiety and uncertainty about the upcoming session and meeting.

Not everything went as smoothly, however: On the day of the TC session, I arrived at the room early to make sure everything was in place and ready to go—only to discover that the overhead projector—critical for Barbara’s presentation—was missing! Bruce Morrill had also arrived early, and I pulled him out into the lobby to figure out what to do. Bruce promptly spotted a door marked

¹⁸ North American Committee 1989 minutes (2.2.5).

“Employees Only” and very much to my surprise quickly disappeared behind it, a move that only increased my anxiety level. Two or three minutes later—though it seemed much longer than that!—Bruce emerged from behind the door, along with a hotel electrician. I explained the problem of the missing overhead projector to the electrician, who informed me that I would have to contact the hotel’s front desk about it. At that point it was my turn to surprise Bruce: I informed the electrician that there was not enough time before the session began to contact the front desk, and I started pulling \$20 bills out of my wallet. We quickly reached a satisfactory agreement (\$60, as I recall), and he immediately went off to install the overhead projector, stringing electrical cable down the aisle even as the room was filling with attendees.

Overall, the session went very well, as did the IGNTP with Barbara and Klaus. One major issue that had stood in the way of cooperation on other occasions—which text to use as a collating base—was no longer an issue, as the rise of computer technology had taken that issue off the table.

Two points regarding which there *was* disagreement were first, which book of the NT the IGNTP might work on: Barbara suggested that the IGNTP begin with Romans, whereas the IGNTP folks, having worked on John for more than decade, were strongly inclined to continue the work on the fourth gospel. Second was the still-lingering question of whether the IGNTP would publish an apparatus or produce a critical text. Nonetheless, there was wide agreement on all sides that cooperation between Munster and IGNTP was vital and (in Barbara’s opinion) “necessary.”¹⁹

The discussion initiated in San Francisco in Nov. 1997 continued through 1998. Momentum accelerated in April 1999 at the 2nd Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, whose topic was: “The IGNTP/INTF Work on the Gospel according to John.” Key presenters included Parker (“The state of progress on the Gospel of John”), Aland (“The IGNTP: An Assessment of its Plans, Achievements, and Future Goals”), and Wachtel (“Co-operation of Various Institutions in Editing the New Testament: First Steps”), and of course the discussion continued over meals, etc.²⁰ The result was that “While a formal alliance of IGNTP and INTF “was not” yet “in the offing, a working relationship was solidly established.”²¹ In addition, concrete steps included the decision to use the COLLATE software and abandon the TR as a collating base, and to work towards a critical edition and apparatus that would look like the ECM edition.²²

Many of the key people met again at a conference that summer in Wassenar, and continuing discussions led to the conclusion that the International Steering Committee needed to be re-structured to include Münster representatives.²³

¹⁹ NA Committee 1997 Minutes, 3.1.

²⁰ Source: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/itsee/events/bham-colloquium.aspx> [consulted 2023-10-21].

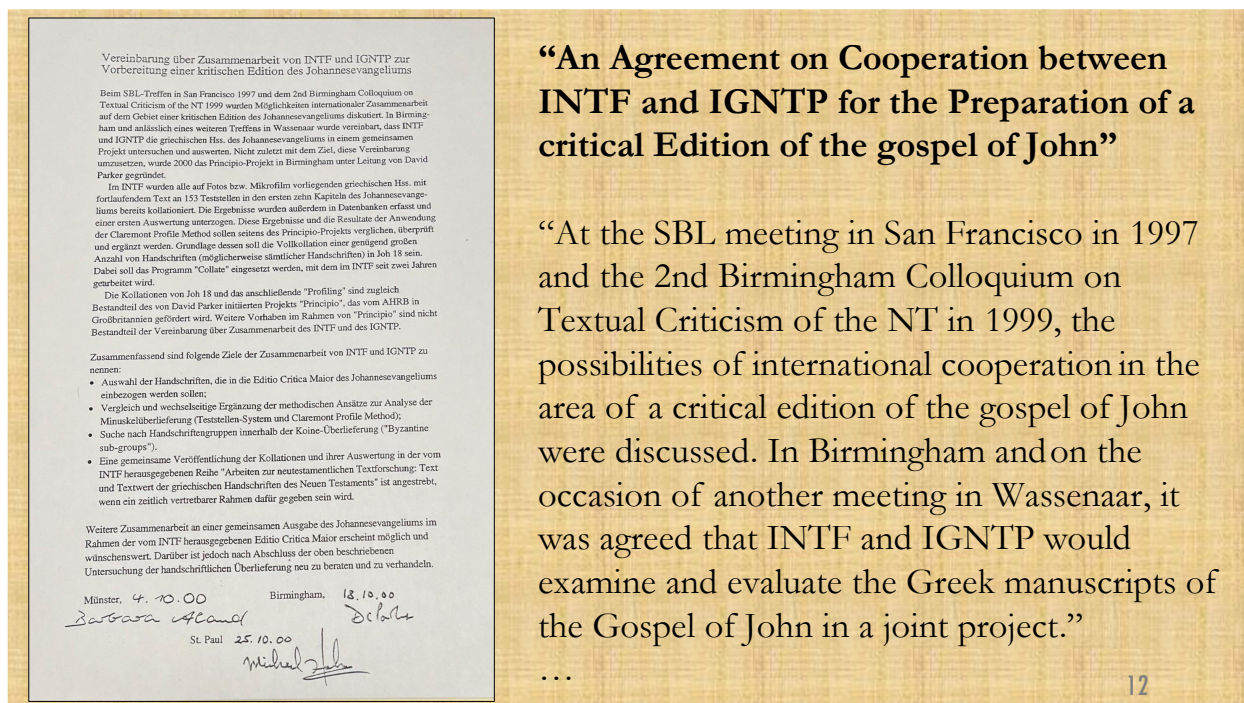
²¹ NA Comm 1999 Minutes, 3.7.1.

²² NA Comm 1999 Minutes, 3.7.2.1-2, 5.

²³ DCP, IGNTP Editorial Report, September 1999.

About that same time, Parker expressed the realization that continuing to model the John project on the Luke project—in particular the reliance upon part-time volunteers to produce an apparatus—would only replicate many of the shortcomings that afflicted the Luke project.²⁴ Meanwhile, Klaus Wachtel was working on an essay (published in early 2000) that included his calculations estimating how long it would take INTF/Münster to finish the job on its own—82 years!²⁵

- #12) All this discussion and activity led to a formal agreement signed in October 2000: “An agreement on cooperation between INTF and IGNTP for the preparation of a critical edition of the gospel of John.” It spelled out four specific goals for cooperation between the INTF and the IGNTP.²⁶



- #13) If successful, then “Further cooperation on a joint edition of the Gospel of John within the framework of the *Editio Critica Maior* published by the INTF seems possible and desirable.” A month short of three years after the possibility of cooperation was raised in San Francisco, an agreement to cooperate became a reality.²⁷

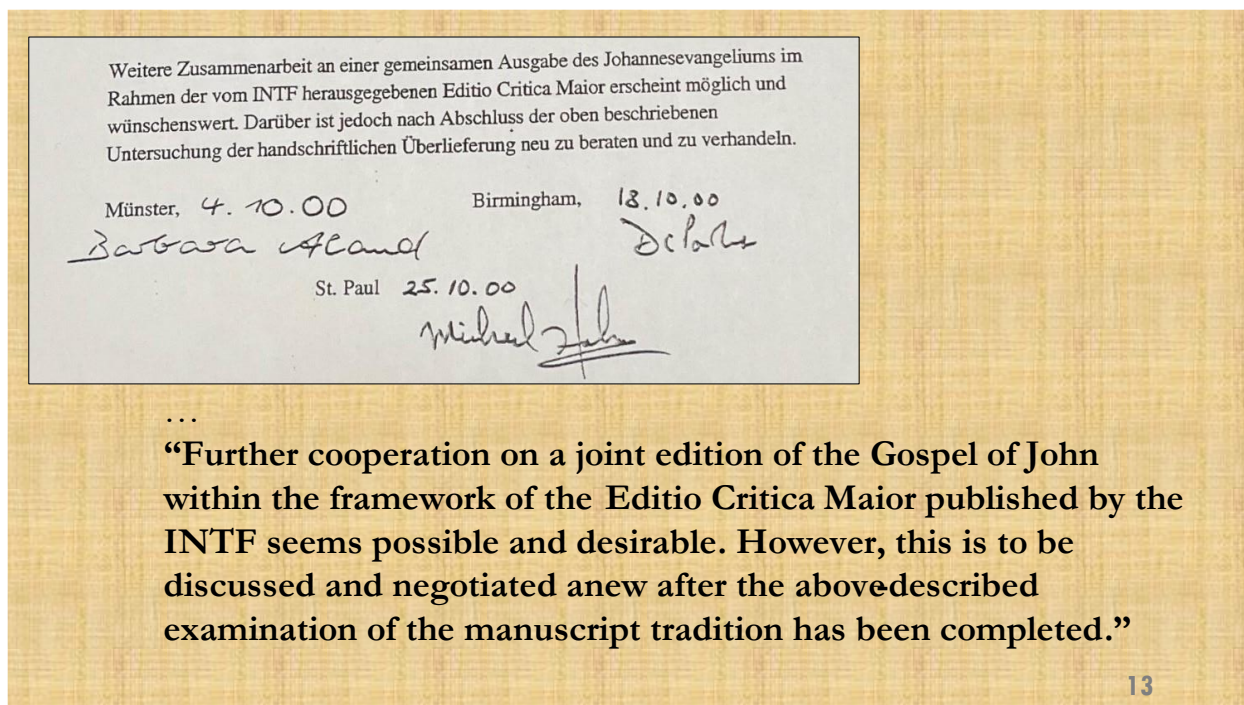
²⁴ DCP, IGNTP Editorial Report, September 1999.

²⁵ Wachtel, “Editing the Greek NT,” 48.

²⁶ “In summary, the following goals of the cooperation between INTF and IGNTP can be mentioned:

- Selection of the manuscripts to be included in the *Editio Critica Maior* of the Gospel of John;
- Comparison and mutual complementation of the methodological approaches to the analysis of the minuscule tradition (*Textstellen* approach and Claremont Profile Method);
- Search for manuscript groups within the Koine tradition (“Byzantine sub-groups”).
- A joint publication of the collations and their evaluation in the series *Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung: Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* published by the INTF is intended if there is a reasonable time frame for this.

²⁷ NA Comm 2000 Minutes, 3.4.



- #14) Cooperation on the four goals was successful, further steps followed, and today, we are all awaiting (in the words of Parker, Wachtel, Morrill, and Schmid) the publication of “the IGntp edition of John as part of the *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior*.”²⁸

To summarize the story: this time around, the possibility of international cooperation was not lost. The reality and scope of this development is well-illustrated by the composition of those attending the May 2023 meeting of what is now called simply the “IGntp Committee”: 24 members (25% of whom are women), representing nine nations (Austria, Belgium, England, Germany, Greece, the Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.S.)

- #15) 2.4: Epp’s first point characterized the Lucan decades as “a time of good intentions, good will, and good work.” I’m not sure what he meant by “good work,” as the Luke volumes were uniformly judged a failure, and for good reasons,²⁹ so I will leave that part to the side.

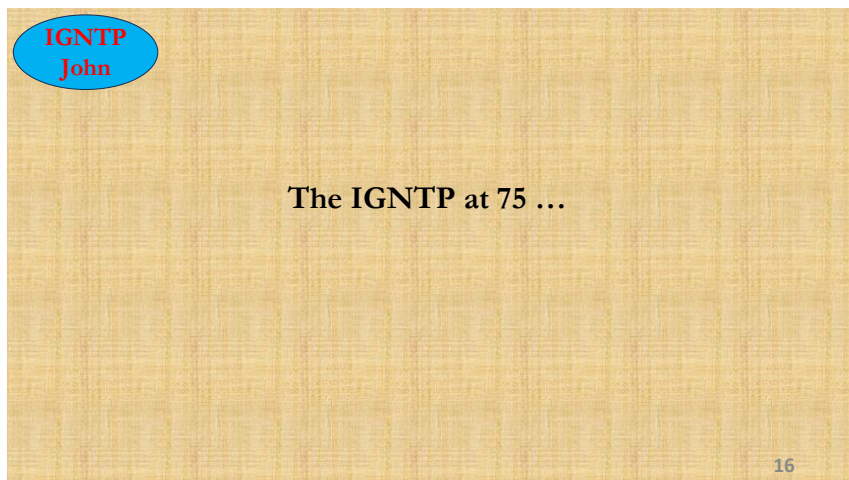
Good intentions and good will, however, have been evident in abundance from the start of the John project. Both committees displayed respect and consideration for the other, and the division of work between the committees did not hinder volunteer work across committee lines: Gordon Fee and I, for example, reviewed the transcriptions of P66 and P45 for the Papyri volume, and Bruce Morrill, a key member of the North American committee, ended up doing his PhD at Birmingham.

²⁸ This is the language of Parker, Wachtel, Morrill, and Schmid in their essay in the Holmes FS (p. 287).

²⁹ For an excellent summary of the devastating reviews of the Luke volumes, see Elliott, *Essays*, 580-590.

This mindset of good intentions and good will continued as the relationship with the folks at Münster developed. What had been initial disagreements became the focus of discussion and were resolved fruitfully over time: e.g., Münster acceded to IGNTP’s desire to continue with John, while the IGNTP accepted Münster’s vision of producing a critical edition. And of course, the socializing that went on between sessions and over meals at events such as the 2nd Birmingham Colloquium or the SBL Annual Meetings facilitated the development of good and genuine relationships on all sides.

#16) 3. Where does all this leave the IGNTP on the occasion of its 75th anniversary?



The last two points I have discussed—the successful international collaboration achieved by the IGNTP and the accompanying ethos of good will and good intentions—are, I think, crucial to the continued success of the IGNTP John project, and indeed of the NTG/ECM enterprise as a whole. Could Münster complete the ECM on its own? Yes, of course, but by Klaus’s own calculations, it would require many decades to do so. Could Birmingham continue to achieve much on its own? Undoubtedly. Yet I think they can accomplish far more together than either can by working alone. My fishing partner recently remarked that he thought the two of us were more successful fishing together than either of us fishing alone, and I think that is the case with Münster and Birmingham, together with the many other centers where work is also being done. By working together, the scholars and institutions that comprise the IGNTP have achieved an operational scale and critical mass that is crucial for future success; the loss of any one leader or institution is unlikely to threaten the long-term viability of the project.

Will the ECM be completed before the IGNTP celebrates its 100th anniversary? Such knowledge is not ours to know. Will the ECM be completed? I suggest that the recent history and the resulting favorable present circumstances give us good reason to think the answer will almost certainly be “yes.” Best wishes, good luck—and long life!—to all of you who are working towards that goal.
