The Council of Constance effectively ended the Great Schism. It succeeded when earlier efforts—war, arbitration, negotiation, mutual abdication of the contenders, and even earlier conciliar efforts—had failed. The story of its success is an improbable one. When one considers the many ways in which it could have and almost did go wrong, the many obstacles to its success, and the many fortuitous events that contributed to the final victory, one is amazed that the Schism was ever terminated. In telling the story, I will emphasize the major obstacles and the ways in which they were overcome, showing how the Council built on earlier developments, also avoiding some of the earlier pitfalls. At each point I will identify the most important secondary works, the major differences of opinion among previous scholars, and the primary sources on which their judgments are based. No attempt will be made in this short space to be exhaustive, nor will I reproduce the thorough bibliographies found in the two outstanding recent monographs on the council by Ansgar Frenken and Walter Brandmüller. This chapter owes an enormous debt to them.

Frenken’s historiographical survey of 100 years of scholarship on the

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1 Ansgar Frenken, Die Erforschung des Konstanzer Konzils (1414–1418) in den letzten 100 Jahren (Paderborn, 1995) [= Annuarium historiae conciliorum 25 (1993)], pp. 1–512. This work was originally written as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Cologne, directed by Odilo Engels and Erich Meuthen. (The dissertation was submitted and defended in 1994.)

Council appeared in 1994, exactly halfway between the publication dates of the two volumes of Brandmüller’s monograph on the Council (1991 and 1997). It provides thorough and balanced judgments of earlier interpretations, showing how the interpretations of historians in different European countries have diverged from one another and noting with approval the more recent internationalizing of scholarship. Frenken celebrates the earlier efforts in this latter direction made by Heinrich Finke, whose monumental scholarship unearthed and made accessible most of the remaining unknown manuscript sources of the council in the great *Acta concilii Constanciensis* (hereafter cited as ACC). In his survey of the scholarship concerning the council’s efforts to end the Schism, Frenken underlines the council’s systematic refusal to decide who was the legitimate pope, calling this the council’s “pragmatism.”

Even the leading theorists of the day were tired of useless theological discussions, says Frenken; now “the only issue was to get rid of the stiffnecked and unloved papal pretenders.”

Brandmüller often reiterates, but more ironically, this “famous pragmatism” of the Council. For him it becomes a “hard pragmatism,” because of what it meant for the three papal contenders, all of whom he views with much more sympathy than Frenken. Brandmüller’s is the first complete modern history of the Council. It is based on exhaustive consultation of earlier and more recent scholarship and uses all the available primary sources, including many new manuscript sources that Brandmüller himself first identified in libraries and archives. Scholars of the Council’s union efforts will want to compare his bold new interpretations with the major earlier studies, including Finke’s relevant introductory sections in the ACC and the sources he edits there and the works of Noël Valois and Sebastián Puig y Puig, still immensely valuable even though these scholars often worked without

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3 Frenken, *Erforschung*, p. 166: “Daß die Frage der Legitimität die Konzilsväter berührte, steht außer Frage. Zur Wiederherstellung der Union stellte dieses Problem jedoch ein nahezu unüberwindbares Hindernis dar. Pragmatisches Handeln, was konkret die Ausklammerung dieser Frage bedeutete, prägte daher das Verhalten des Konzils…”
