CHAPTER FOUR

NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE SUBSIDY, 1533–1534

After the serious difficulties in the summer of 1533, there was undoubtedly much hope that the Assembly of the Clergy meeting in Alcalá de Henares would quickly reach an amenable agreement with the king for the payment of a subsidy. Instead, the meeting became the longest Assembly of Charles’s reign, lasting from October 10, 1533, until March 18, 1534. The duration of this Assembly allows us to better understand political practice and see how crown and clergy reached consensus in sixteenth-century Castile. The present chapter examines the differences between the crown and the Assembly, the means of applying pressure within the context of these negotiations, the role of consultations as both a stratagem and hindrance to successful negotiations, and finally the rifts within the ecclesiastical estate.

Pending Negotiations

On September 15, 1533, Alonso de Fonseca, the archbishop of Toledo, informed the king that his chapter had convened the Assembly of the Clergy and expected some representatives to arrive in Alcalá by September 20. The chapter advised him, however, that some chapters refused to send representatives, claiming that the sequestration of ecclesiastical rents prevented them from leaving their churches or that Assemblies customarily met at court, so they should meet there, not in Alcalá. The absence of representatives from an unspecified number of chapters worried both the archbishop and chapter of Toledo. Consequently, in his letter to Charles, the archbishop hinted that the Assembly should probably meet at court, since the archbishop’s ill health and age would prevent him from taking a firm hand in the negotiations and potentially cause delays.¹

Even more problematic for the pending negotiations was the sequestration. Some chapters had not sent representatives because of it,

¹ AGS, E leg. 27, f. 225.
others had ordered their representatives not to discuss anything until it ended, and still others had ordered their representatives to return to their churches if it was not lifted. Consequently, on September 28, the archbishop of Toledo advised the king to lift the sequestration immediately. In addition to placating the clergy, the archbishop believed, lifting the sequestration was strategically wise. That way, he said, force would still be an option if negotiations bogged down later. He also asked the king for clear instructions on what would serve him in the negotiations. Otherwise, the archbishop explained, the need for regular consultations between royal ministers in Alcalá and the king in Aragon would prolong the negotiations. Finally, the archbishop again asked for license to leave Alcalá on account of his health, adding that from his bed he would be able to do little in the negotiations and did not want his ill health to prevent their quick and successful conclusion.²

Absent chapters, lifting the sequestration, clear instructions, and the archbishop’s health were not the only potential sticking points in the negotiations. In separate reports at the end of September, Cardinal Tavera, archbishop of Santiago and president of the royal council, and Juan de Enciso, a treasury official, outlined several more. First, the representatives proposed serving the king voluntarily with a free gift and not being obliged to pay anything on account of the bull of the medios frutos. Second, they wanted a guarantee from the king not to ask for a subsidy without a good cause and papal permission. Yet, Enciso reported, some representatives disagreed over the usefulness of such a guarantee. Third, they wanted the king to procure a papal brief to include all exempt clergy who had contributed in the last subsidy. They opposed the papal brief that exempted benefices worth less than 12 ducados, explaining that it would be time consuming and costly, if not impossible, to investigate the values of these benefices to determine which were truly exempt. For these reasons, the representatives recommended including all exempted clergy in the present contribution. Tavera noted that, given the large number of poorer benefices, especially in Galicia and northern Castile, the crown would either have to include them or else provide discounts, as it had in the past. Fourth, most representatives opposed reapportioning the subsidy to relieve the

² AGS, E. leg. 27, f. 228; PR leg. 20, f. 36. On October 1, Charles approved moving the Assembly to Madrid where the climate might be better for the archbishop, but his response apparently arrived too late to make a difference. See AGS, E leg. 26, f. 243.