CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

During Charles’s reign, the Castilian church convened thirteen Assemblies of the Clergy, but, despite its frequent meetings, the Castilian Assembly of the Clergy has remained a relatively unknown institution in Spanish and European history. Through the preceding case studies, this book has examined the structure and function of the Castilian Assembly of the Clergy in order to provide a better understanding of finance, governance, political practice, and church-state relations in sixteenth-century Castile.

To expand their financial base, the ‘new monarchies’ often turned to the church. Some negotiated for the contributions with the pope or the clergy or both, while others broke with Rome and placed themselves at the head of the church. John Lynch asserts that by the second half of the sixteenth century:

[Philip’s] methods were probably more effective than those of Protestant rulers who confiscated church property. The English crown sold monastic land for ready cash and failed to derive a long-term revenue from it. Philip II, on the other hand, by maintaining and extending church property and then taxing a prosperous institution ensured that the Spanish state possessed yet another source of revenue…¹

Despite the twists and turns of negotiations with the Assembly and papacy, the Spanish crown benefited from its financial relations with the church. By the mid-sixteenth century, the cruzada and subsidy together provided more money than the servicio of the Cortes. By the early seventeenth century, the Tres Gracias still provided the crown with 13.3 percent of royal revenue, more money than the servicio of the Cortes (3.7 percent) but less than the millones tax (18.6 percent). The Assembly itself negotiated the payments of just over 6 percent of royal

income (670,000 ducados out of a total annual income of 10,750,000 ducados in 1621).²

The growth of the size of the subsidy payments corresponds roughly to the growth of the servicio payments during Charles V’s reign. Between 1519 and 1556, the church transferred roughly 1,187,250,000 maravedís in subsidies to the crown. Between 1519 and 1537, 437,250,000 maravedís was collected (37 percent of the total) and between 1538 and 1556, 750,000,000 maravedís (63 percent). If Julius III’s concession had not been revoked in 1555, the breakdown would have been slightly different: 437,250,000 maravedís (31.8 percent) for 1519–1537 and 937,500,000 maravedís (68.2 percent) for 1538–1556.³ These hypothetical proportions during the first and second period would have corresponded almost exactly to the percentages of the servicio the Cortes paid in the same periods, which was less than one-third for 1519–1537 and over two-thirds for 1538–1556.⁴ The financial burden on the Spanish kingdoms, then, increased dramatically after 1538, and both secular and ecclesiastical assemblies paid more in the second period than in the first, indicating that both experienced a similar proportional increase in taxation. The Assembly of the Clergy, therefore, did not necessarily fare any worse than the Cortes in its negotiations with the crown. At the same time, increasing fiscal demands made both representative institutions more important partners in government, especially as guarantors of royal credit.⁵

Nevertheless, judging by monetary figures alone, the Assembly’s record for limiting the fiscal demands of the monarchy appears mixed. Between 1519 and 1555, the subsidy increased seven-fold, from

² These calculations are adapted from Helen Rawlings, Church, religion and society in early modern Spain (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 135–137.
³ Tarsicio de Azcona’s figures were used to calculate the total contribution made during Charles V’s reign. These totals include both the crowns of Castile and Aragon, and Azcona includes 500,000 ducados for 1555 even though the crown returned the money to the Castilian dioceses in 1556. For a point of comparison, I have both included and excluded that amount in the calculations above. See “Estado e Iglesia en España a la luz de las asambleas del clero en el siglo XVI,” Actas del congreso internacional Teresiano (1983), pp. 314–315.