

## **Working title “Augustine the bishop between theology and politics”**

The project, interested in the formation of christianities in the Latin West, is focused on Augustine of Hippo, one of the leading ecclesiastical figures in the West, in his role as a bishop. The bishopric is primarily seen as a juncture of various forms of power and its exercise. Far from being a purely theological office the bishop in general and especially Augustine – due to his elevated status already among contemporaries – is in many ways engaged in matters juridical and political, domestic and extern. The project deals with the boundaries between these spheres, whose distinction is often created by post-antique categories and conceptions, being mediated by contemporary actors.

During various disputes with remaining pagans, but mainly with the Donatist schismatics, different opportunities for interaction between church, imperial institutions and social groups occurred. Augustine’s actions in this field are at the center of the study. In all relevant fields, from political and military disruptions to the drastic transitions caused by the advancing christianization of society, his historical environment was subject to profound change. So ways of communication between bishops and secular powers could not rely on institutionalized paths. As is characteristic for premodern times, they are centered around personal contact, spatial presence, if possible, and networking with relevant groups and positions. In the case of Augustine, his extensive corpus of letters provides a valuable source for the study of this kind of communication.

The letters show, how much political and juridical discussion in Augustine is interspersed with theological propositions and convictions. At the same time it is not primarily about dogmatical thought and its controversy within christianity, but rather about categories, ascriptions und allocations, by which the bishop attributes or denies certain areas of action to his interlocutors. The theological point of view is not opposed to the political, but forms it and its range. The distinction, therefore, between politics and theology is insufficient with regard to the relation between bishop and worldly officials. It seems more prolific to examine the way, theological propositions form the comprehension of political institutions and – in turn – the way, political circumstances are reflected in theological concepts. It is also possible to read the more systematical theological and philosophical of Augustine’s works from this point of view. The project does not want to give a historical reconstruction of dogmatical positions, but an interpretation of theological notions in respect of clerical and political power and how it is shaped and determined by these notions. The concept of pastoral power will be a key element here.

The study is based on the assumption, that decisive steps in the historical development forming the Latin church in her relation to worldly authorities, are closely connected to Augustine and his time and that recently this relation seems to have become of vital interest again.