Introduction

As founders of the Christian church, the apostles are important protagonists of iconoclash in medieval narrative and liturgical traditions. The apostolic missionary activity after Pentecost is, in the case of most apostles, not described in the canonical New Testament. However, extra-canonical sources add to our knowledge of early Christian traditions on the founding work of the apostles. Moreover, in the collective and public liturgical cult of the apostles, their contribution to the foundation of the worldwide *ecclesia* is an important theme. In the following, some lines of comparison will be drawn between apocryphal narratives on the one hand and liturgical sources on the other, with respect to the medieval Latin traditions. In this consideration of apocryphal and liturgical material the focus will be on the clash between the apostle as representative of the new, Christian religion, and forces that are represented as endangering that religion. Since the latter are usually presented in Christian texts as demonic powers, it seems fit to study the texts under consideration against the background of medieval traditions of demonology. This will enable us to depict a certain transformation in approaches to the demoniacal. As far as terminology is concerned, a word of caution is of importance: given the fact that we are dealing with textual sources originating in a Christian context, the representatives of the non-Christian religion are pejoratively depicted as ‘idols’, ‘demons’, and ‘magicians’. Despite the prejudiced connotation of this terminology, I will maintain it without further apology, aware of its one-sided perspective.

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Demons in the medieval Christian world: four manifestations

The world of medieval Christianity was threatened by demons in numerous ways. As a framework, I will first discuss four main manifestations of demonic power in a Christian environment, and then focus on the occurrence of two of these in apocryphal and liturgical apostle traditions of the (early) medieval period.

Clearing the path for the new religion

Before such a thing as a ‘Christian environment’ could come into existence, the field had to be cleared from the powers and gods worshipped in the local tradition. Demons inhabited images of idols, and from there exercised power over their people. At least, that is how the situation is depicted by the missionaries of the new religion. In the Latin apocryphal traditions, the apostle is first and foremost the founder of the new, ‘true’ religion of Christianity. Upon arrival in the mission area he had been sent to at the divisio apostolorum after Pentecost, the apostle entered into combat with the local gods.

The Christian community and demonic powers from outside

Once a Christian community was founded the hostile powers of demons were not expelled definitively. The young congregation was threatened from outside by all kinds of demonic temptations, and had to be armed against them. Baptismal candidates had to go through elaborate rites of exorcism and rejection of the devil before they were allowed to be baptized (cf. Jeanes 1999). After baptism, the sign of the cross and other ritual and spiritual armament remained indispensable throughout life.

The monastery a spotless place

Once the process of Christianization bore fruit and the number of churches in the landscape increased, the need was felt to cleanse the inner-Christian world from within. From this point of view, the development of monastic life in the early medieval period can be seen as a movement of purification. Although monastic values such as a chaste way of life counted in general for every Christian, a growing division became visible between those who lived ‘in the world’ and those who radically and consistently ‘rejected the world’ by withdrawing within