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KYOTO LECTURES

Wednesday, December 3rd, 18:00h

Joseph O'Leary SPEAKER

Moral and Ontological Paradox in the *The Teaching of Vimalakirti*

Readers of the Mahayana sutra, *The Teaching of Vimalakirti*, will encounter shocking antinomian declarations, to the effect that the true bodhisattva will break every imaginable Buddhist precept. Like Luther's notorious *Pecca fortiter* these statements pose a hermeneutical challenge. They can be connected with the ontological paradoxes attaching to the central teaching of the sutra, on emptiness and nonduality, but here again hermeneutical challenges abound. Etienne Lamotte and others seek a framework of understanding in the Madhyamaka philosophy, but there are two problems with this. First, it is not clear to what degree the sutra anticipates the precise teachings and arguments of Madhyamaka, and second, it is not sure that the Madhyamaka distinctions, notably that between conventional and ultimate truth, can clarify the sutra's paradoxes in a fully satisfying way. The best approach is to take the sutra as itself its own interpreter and to see if the paradoxes can be illuminated by examining how they fit into their context. While the sutra assembles a great amount of received Buddhist lore, its specific emphases project an original imaginative and doctrinal vision which demands to be brought into focus. Though its paradoxes are designed to baffle mundane understanding, a literary and philosophical appraisal of their impact can open up a more vibrant dialogue between the text and its readers.

Joseph O'Leary, professor of English Literature at Sophia University, is an Irish theologian who is interested in the resources offered by Buddhist philosophy for a renewal of Christian theology. From next April he will hold the Roche Chair at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Nanzan University. His principal publications are a trilogy in fundamental theology: *Questioning Back* (1985), *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth* (1996), and *Conventional and Ultimate Truth* (forthcoming), with four intercalary works in French, including *Philosophie occidentale et concepts bouddhistes* (2011).

This lecture will be held at the Institute for Research in Humanities (IRH), Kyoto University (seminar room 1, 1st floor).

École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO)
29 Betto-cho Kitashirakawa, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8276 Japan

Italian School of East Asian Studies (ISEAS)
4th Floor, 4 Yoshida Ushinomiya-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8302 Japan

EFEO | T: 075-701-0882 F: 075-701-0883 E: efeo.kyoto@gmail.com

ISEAS | T: 075-751-8132 F: 075-751-8221 E: iseas@iseas-kyoto.org

