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## Jean-Nicolas Bitter

**Jean-Nicolas Bitter**  
*University of Berne*

### "Religions, Violence and Conflict Resolution: How to Negotiate Between Religions"

**Thursday, January 27, 2005**  
**12:30 p.m.**  
**Mershon Center**  
**Room 120**

*Lunch will be served to those who RSVP to [Ann Powers](#) no later than Tuesday, January 25, 2005.*

Religions can be usefully conceptualized as matrixes of social constructions of reality. In this view, they constitute vital "fiduciary systems" (Polanyi) for the communities who inhabit them. Imposing a "worldview", a "world" or a "religion" is one of the worst form of oppression and violence (Oscar Nudler). Interactions between religions are therefore susceptible to be violent. Conflicts between "worlds" are complex because their respective values and interests are not independent from each other: values do shape interests, and the latter cannot be bargained anymore. George Lindbeck has developed a cultural and linguistic model of religion (*The Nature of Doctrine*, 1984) - cognitively and politically neutral - that helps to understand how religions and doctrines can be both firm and flexible. Now, if religions are taken seriously, one can nevertheless think of the possibilities of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation. In terms of practical conflict resolution, the model opens space for conceptualizing and implementing negotiation processes aiming at cohabitation between worlds (this was missing in the case of Waco, and is missing in dealing with political Islam). In our contemporary world, says Lindbeck, "what is needed is a religious orthodoxy committed to a liberal polity".

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After completing his degree in Theology at the University of Lausanne, Mr. Bitter served as a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Lebanon, the Occupied Territories, Pakistan and Afghanistan. While conducting research in the field of religious dimensions of conflicts (visiting fellow from 1994 to 1996 at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution - ICAR - at George Mason University, Virginia), he further worked for the ICRC in Moldova, Ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Iran and Sri Lanka. He did consultancy work in conflict resolution and completed his Ph.D. thesis on the interplay between values and interests in conflicts between "worlds". (*Les dieux embusqués. Une approche pragmatique de la dimension religieuse des conflits*, Genève-Paris, Droz, 2003).

Since July 2001, Mr Bitter is program officer in the section for civilian peace operations within the division on human security of the MFA, covering Central Asia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the thematic of "dialogue of civilisations".