Why Do Wars Begin?  
A Catholic Answer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Debate rages within the Catholic Church about the ethics of war and peace, but the simple question of why wars begin is too often neglected. Catholics’ assumptions about the causes of conflict are almost always drawn uncritically from international relations theory—a field dominated by liberalism, realism, and Marxism—which is not always consistent with Catholic theology.

In *The Origins of War*, Matthew A. Shadle examines several sources to better understand why war happens. His retrieval of biblical literature and the teachings of figures from church tradition sets the course for the book. Shadle then explores the growing awareness of historical consciousness within the Catholic tradition—the way beliefs and actions are shaped by time, place, and culture. He examines the work of contemporary Catholic thinkers like Pope John Paul II, Jacques Maritain, John Courtney Murray, Dorothy Day, Brian Hehir, and George Weigel. In the constructive part of the book, Shadle analyzes the movement within international relations theory known as constructivism—which proposes that war is largely governed by a set of socially constructed and cultural influences. Constructivism, Shadle claims, presents a way of interpreting international politics that is highly amenable to a Catholic worldview and can provide a new direction for the Christian vocation of peacemaking.

Tobias Winright, of Saint Louis University, praises *The Origins of War* saying, “With an impressive command of both the theological tradition and the relevant literature in contemporary international relations theory, Matthew Shadle offers a thoroughly theological account of the origins of war that constructively carves out a way forward beyond the liberal–conservative impasse among Catholic thinkers on the ethics of war today.” Mark J. Allman, of Merrimak College, agrees, asserting that Matthew Shadle “masterfully addresses the question, ‘Why war?’ by gleaning the first fruits from two fields: international relations theory and theological ethics. In this he represents what’s best in the new generation of theological ethicists: the ability to place the social sciences in dialogue with Christian tradition in a way that is critical, creative, honest, and relevant to our time.”

Matthew A. Shadle is an assistant professor of moral theology at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa.

PUBLICATION DATE: April 2011, 256 pages
ISBN 978-1-58901-735-1, paperback $29.95 / £20.75

CONTACT: Jacqueline Beilhart, Publicist, (202) 687-9298, jb594@georgetown.edu

# # #