Yves Congar



Diary of the 1914–1918 War



with notes and introduction by
Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau

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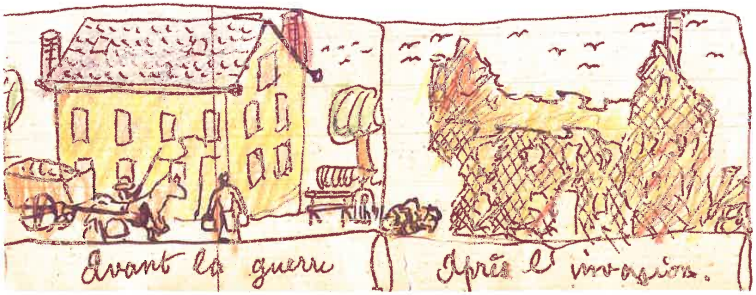
Diary of the 1914–1918 War

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Yves Congar

Diary of the 1914–1918 War



Notes and Commentary by
Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau
and Dominique Congar

Translated from the French by
Mary John Ronayne OP
Helen T Frank

ATF PRESS
2015

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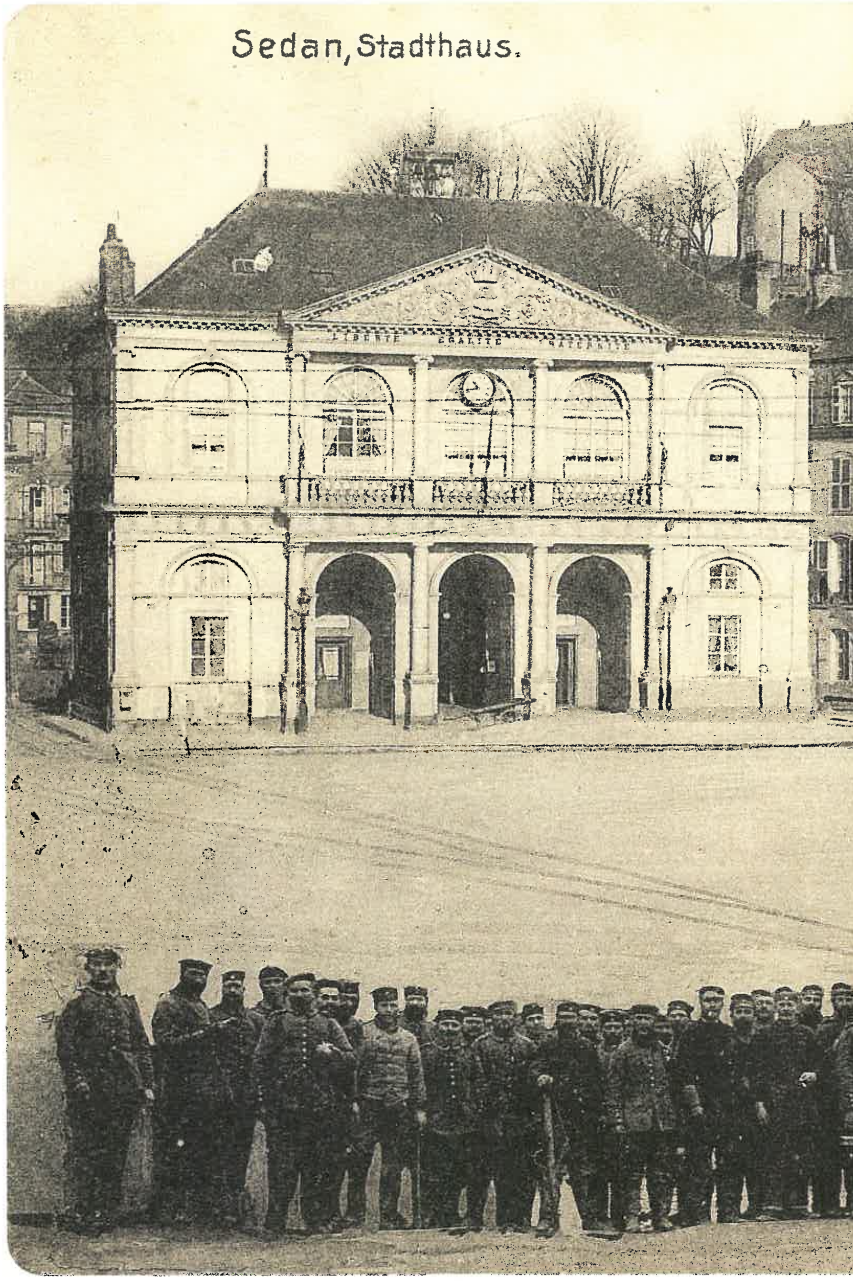
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Sedan, Town Hall



TRANSLATORS' NOTE

The editors of the French original of young Yves Congar's Diary of the 1914-1918 War explain that they had respected the original French text as far as possible in transcribing it for publication. This created a number of problems for the translators, faced with a text written by a child aged ten in 1914 and fourteen when the war came to an end in 1918; a text, moreover, which not only reproduced the spelling and grammatical errors found in the original, but also the vocabulary of the dialect of the Ardennes where the Congar family lived. In order to convey both the meaning and the mood of the original as simply and faithfully as possible, a number of the footnotes in the French text clarifying mis-spellings or other anomalies in the French have been omitted in the English text, while at the same time additional footnotes have been inserted where deemed necessary.

Ten-year old Yves' spelling was poor, and he was very sparing in the use of full stops and capital letters. Where necessary, words or punctuation not actually in the original have been inserted in square brackets in the translation, while at the same time all question marks and other oddities contained in the French text as printed have been faithfully reproduced.

It seems important to note that the diary as we have it is the result of careful editing on the part of its youthful author. He seems to have made brief notes of events more or less as they happened, and to have written them up (and illustrated them) at some later date. This is clear from the entry for 9th March 1918 which begins as follows:

'There were bombs at one o'clock in the morning; I do not remember having heard them (I am writing this on 13th April, my birthday, on which there was a real bombardment)'.

This procedure probably explains the confusion about dates that is apparent from time to time and perhaps also the fact that he never actually finished the diary. The last entry was written on 8th November 1918, three days before the Armistice, and it was not until July 1923 that he finally rounded off his diary, so to speak, largely on the basis of his brother Robert's own diary entries about the last days of the war.

Mary John RONAYNE OP
Helen T FRANK
24 October 2014

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS BY JEAN-PIERRE JOSSUA OP

YVES CONGAR was born in Sedan in 1904. A primary reason for publishing his diary of the 1914-1918 war is the fact that he was deeply rooted in his environment, his hometown, his country, with the patriotism and that love for the army characteristic of a frontier area, even though all these things are expressed here in a child's way. He was rooted also in his Christian family, in his Catholic Church, with its strong tradition of faith and liturgy. And the fact that this theologian-to-be was to become a pioneer of Christian unity is also linked with his having witnessed in Sedan the friendly way in which Catholics, Protestants and Jews lived together.

This brings us to a second reason for publishing such a diary. Congar was destined to occupy an important place in the history of the Christian Churches during the 20th Century. In order to show how this was so, it is first necessary to summarise his career. In 1921, he entered the University seminary in Paris, which he left in 1925 in order to join the Dominican novitiate. There followed the years he spent in the Saulchoir House of Studies, then located in Kain near Tournai in Belgium, followed by specialised studies. He then became a member of the new team of professors, first at Kain, then at Étiolles near Corbeil, under the leadership of Frère Marie-Dominique Chenu. From 1932 until the Second World War, he taught, contributed to a number of Parisian magazines, created a collection, 'Unam Sanctam' in the recently founded Éditions du Cerf, and published an important work, *Chrétiens désunis* [Divided Christendom] (1937).

After the 'phoney war' and his own imprisonment, he returned to Saulchoir d'Étiolles for some very fruitful years of publication in the stimulating environment which was the Catholic Church after the Liberation. *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église* [True and False Reform in the Church] (1950); *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* [Lay People in the Church] (1953), among many others, proved very popular. Disapproved of because of his ecumenical gestures, his involvement in the priest-worker movement, and to a greater extent in the reformist climate that was being reined in during the latter years of the papacy of Pius XII, he experienced enforced silence and exile. Brought to Strasbourg by Mgr Wéber in 1956, he resumed his work in better conditions until the preparations for Vatican II and then the implementation of the Council itself, which represented for him an astonishing rehabilitation, enabling him to collaborate decisively in the composition of the Council documents and to become increasingly influential up to the time of his death in 1995. His death was preceded by a long and painful illness which he lived out as a patient in the Hôpital des Invalides, and he took little notice of his nomination as a cardinal. Between 1960 and 1982, a further wide-ranging series of publications enriched his work. These included *La Tradition et les traditions* [Tradition and Traditions] (1963); *Chrétiens en dialogue* [Dialogue between Christians] (1964); *L'Église: de saint Augustin à l'époque moderne* (1970); *Diversité et communion dans les Églises* [Diversity and Communion] (1982/4).

If one wishes to list in order of importance the reasons for Yves Congar's influence on the Churches in our century, one must begin with the fact of his being a historian and the importance, in his eyes, of history, both of these factors being the fruit of his formation at the Saulchoir, thanks to Frère Chenu. His historical works review many questions, and his recourse to history in order to clarify many of the matters being debated in the Catholic Church and between the Churches was to prove decisive. After his death, it was said that his work in this area had been on the same level as that of a Braudel or a Duby [1].

In the second place, from the early 1930's onwards, Yves Congar was convinced that he was being called to serve the unity of Christians. And he responded to this call with a work, a dedication, an ability to listen and a love for the 'separated brethren' that were truly extraordinary. Personal contacts, meetings, publications, created a considerable stir from 1936 onwards and continued to do so until he was forced to quit this field. Even though, after the Council, he did not become a specialised and official 'ecumenist', his considerable influence nevertheless continued.

Finally, at the time when work for unity, from the Catholic side, was halted – round about 1950 – in order to move things forward on a long-term basis thanks to his Church having progressed, and also with a view to renewing the Church itself (this had always been his particular passion), Frère Congar embarked on the study of a number of problems. These included the Reformation, tradition, the laity, priesthood and other ministries, the missions, all of which were to become the questions and problems which, thanks to the impetus given to them by Pope John XXIII, were to form the agenda of the Council in an attempt to bring the Church up to date. He devoted himself to this work with exceptional competence, loyalty and freedom. Hence, the immense and enduring effect of his work.

Jean-Pierre JOSSUA OP
30 June 1997

1 Both Fernand Braudel and Georges Duby were outstanding French historians (Trans).

FOREWORD

Frère Congar entered the Novitiate of the Province of France of the Order of Preachers in 1925. He died at the Institution des Invalides in Paris on 22nd June, 1995. Hence, this indefatigable preacher and theologian lived among his Dominican brethren for seventy years; in particular he was one of the principal *periti* at the Second Vatican Council, which ended on 7th December, 1965.

One of the things Yves Congar was passionately concerned about was the Church and its unity, as well as its presence in the world of the 20th century.

But, before all that, Yves Congar was a small boy. He was ten years of age when the First World War broke out in 1914. He felt his vocation come to birth in him as far back as 1917, as he hints in his boyhood diary.

His Dominican brethren were particularly touched and moved when the five school exercise books in which he had written throughout the five war years in such a very personal and positive way were discovered after his death.

During those five difficult years, other precocious passions were expressed: France and freedom, which he was to continue to defend in later life, in particular during his years of captivity during the Second World War. And already we see his love of describing in detail what he sees, what he feels and what he thinks.

Thus, once again, but in a very original way, the face and personality of our famous elder brother are presented to us.

Frère Éric T de CLERMONT-TONNERRE OP
Prior Provincial, Province of France, 1992–2001

PREFACE

Monday 3rd January, 1994. Paris, metro line nº 8.
I am on the way to 'Salle Turenne' in the Hôpital des Invalides to visit my uncle. Uncle Vonet – the Dominican Yves Congar – is very ill. He is now almost unable to write or to move without propelling his electric wheelchair as quickly as possible. His memory and his mind have remained intact. That gives me great pleasure whenever I go to see him; we very often have animated conversations.

This visit is one of the first in the year and his thoughts turn to the 1914-1918 war. Yes, it was eighty years ago this year ... Then he talks to me about his boyhood diary which he wrote in Sedan during the five years of that war. From memory, he quotes for me the famous comment he made on 25th August, 1914: 'This is the beginning of a tragic story ...'. There will be several references to it in the course of this book. As happens every time he recalls those terrible events, he is deeply moved and refuses to say any more.

During subsequent visits, Uncle Vonet again mentioned his diary. During the long summer holidays of 1914, my grandmother, Tere, asked her four children to keep a holiday diary that they would write up more or less each day, as they chose. She never thought that her suggestion would reach an ultimate conclusion 80 years later.

There were four Congar children. Pierre, Robert, Marie-Louise and Yves. The close-knit family lived in a large family property situated in the Fond de Givonne, one of the suburbs of Sedan, Ardennes, on the road leading to Belgium, the road to the North, the road of Invasions.

I was intrigued by this wartime diary of which my uncle seemed so very fond. He had undoubtedly included many details, details analysed by a very lively ten-year-old boy, who admired his two older brothers, 'the Big/Older Ones'[1], and was also very close to Mimi, his beloved sister (Mimi was born in 1902, Yves in 1904). Whenever we spoke of the Ardennes, of the trees, the rivers, the mists, the snow, of the house at '85 Fond de Givonne', my uncle became animated and reverted to the sensitivity of his adolescence. He emerged from his surly wild boar shell. Every day he studied the silhouette of this animal, emblem of the Ardennes, in the photograph placed in a prominent position on his desk full of books and magazines in his room at the Invalides, the window of which looked out onto the golden dome where lay the Emperor he so admired.

I was equally moved by all he told me as I, too, had often played with my brothers and sisters and my cousins in the very same places, among the same trees, and we had played the same silly tricks.

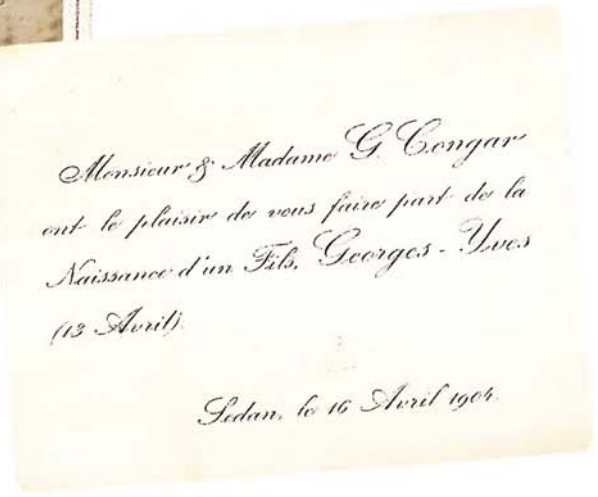
But although the year 1994 caused my uncle to recall the year 1914, it also represented an important date for him as he would turn 90 on 13th April, 1994. Every time I visited him, he mentioned what was, for him, this mythical date in order to ensure that we, too, thought about it and took the necessary steps.

We decided to prepare a celebration. The devoted staff of the Invalides helped me considerably. There were to be two stages. First, a drink with his loyal companions in captivity (Colditz – 1939-40 war); then a reception in the room of his beloved Père Tournier[2]. My son Bruno undertook to cut and distribute the birthday cake and to help in pouring the champagne. His Dominican Brethren were there. Yves Congar was deeply moved. The Provincial, Frère Éric de Clermont-Tonnerre, read to him a letter from Pope John Paul II and a great number of greetings from both France and abroad. He also received a lovely letter,

1. 'les grands'
2. Unidentifiable.



Yves Congar with his wet-nurse.



Monsieur & Madame G. Congar
ont le plaisir de vous faire part de la
Naissance d'un Fils, Georges - Yves
(13 Avril)

Sedan, le 16 Avril 1904

Monsieur and Madame G Congar have pleasure in informing you of the birth of a son Georges-Yves (13th April).

Sedan, 16th April 1904.



Left: Marie-Louise, Lucie (née Desoye) and Yves, on his mother's lap.
Right: Robert, Georges (the father) and Pierre Congar.

warm and personal, from the Master of the Order, Fr Timothy Radcliffe. The old wild boar from the Ardennes was more than overcome.

Sunday, 30th October, 1994. I learnt, from France-Inter, that my uncle had been nominated Cardinal. He was very pleased. But it had come too late; he was too old, too ill.

Monday, 31st October, 1994. I went to the Salle Turenne at the Invalides to congratulate him. He managed to smile in spite of the intense pain. He asked me to get a cardinal's skull cap for him as soon as possible.

Tuesday, 6th December, 1994. I went to see my uncle. He was no longer in his room but in the intensive care unit to which he had been admitted as an emergency. He had suffered a cardiac arrest and everybody was worried. But he wanted to recover, he wanted to be present at the ceremony of presenting the Cardinal's hat. He would hold on. We were all amazed by his determination and his courage.

Thursday, 8th December, 1994. A Cardinal in the church of Saint-Louis des Invalides! It was Cardinal Jean Willebrands, special envoy of Pope John Paul II, who presented him with the hat and the ring. Closely observed by his somewhat anxious doctors, Uncle was present at the ceremony up to the time of Communion. He could not stay any longer. He was brought back to his room as quickly as possible and once more attached to his breathing apparatus.

Then he recovered and returned to his room on the first floor in the Turenne wing where his dedicated nursing staff and Père Tournier were waiting for him.

A few days later, I recalled with him this nomination and the emotion that we had experienced in hearing the very warm and affectionate address by Cardinal Willebrands. Uncle Vonet found it difficult to speak but even so he managed to recall the Ardennes, the 1914 war, his diary, the suffering he endured, his Dominican brethren around him and helping him, but from whom he regretted being separated.

Tuesday, 21st February, 1995. Uncle received the cross of an officer of the Légion d'Honneur from the hands of the Governor, General Maurice Schmitt, in the Salle des Boiseries at the Invalides. In a very fine speech addressed to 'Monsieur le Cardinal, my captain', General Schmitt quickly reviewed the religious and military life of Yves Congar, and he concluded: 'Monsieur le Cardinal, yours has been an extraordinary destiny, as a man of the Church, as a soldier. You deserve the Officer's Cross of the Légion d'Honneur for a number of reasons. I am now going to present it to you in the presence of the members of your family, of the former inmates of Colditz, of your Dominican brethren and finally of those who are here around you'.

Monday, 27th March, 1995. Representatives of the Ardennes General Council made a special trip to Paris in order to pay honour to the 'Cardinal of the Ardennes'. He was given a rug worked in Sedan stitch featuring a wild boar standing and looking out. He asked me to fix it to the wall close to his bed.

More will be said about the Ardennes, Fond de Givonne, Kiki, the War, Tere, Mimi. This First World War made a deep impression on Yves Congar and our family to all of whom he felt so closely united.

Thursday, 22nd June, 1995. Uncle Vonet died alone in his room while he was having his breakfast.

Monday, 26th June, 1995. Notre-Dame de Paris. Funeral Mass of Cardinal Yves Congar. He was buried beside his great friend, Frère Marie-Dominique Chenu, in the Dominican vault in Montparnasse cemetery.

Monday, 29th April, 1996. Frère André Duval from the Priory of Saint-Jacques, the Provincial archivist, wrote to me: 'It's here! ... After going through half a cubic metre of cardboard boxes, I have found the five exercise books of Yves Congar's diary of the 1914-1918 war. It's sensational!'

Tuesday, 30th April, 1996. I hurried to Saint Jacques. There I saw for the first time the diary of a little ten-year-old boy, the youngest of a family of four, a little fellow who dearly loved France, a little fellow who was to become a Dominican Friar and a theologian, who was to take part in Vatican II, become a cardinal and be buried with the French flag in Notre Dame de Paris.

It was with deep emotion that I then opened, read, studied those five school exercise books. I was discovering my uncle as a child, I was seeing my grandparents, my family, 'my' Fond de Givonne, because we all have a 'Fond de Givonne' at the bottom of our hearts.

I will leave to the reader the surprise of discovering, through these pages, all that the land of the Ardennes and its civilian population went through during those painful years.

I would like to address a few words to my uncle's many German friends and ask them to realise that this diary was written by a young patriotic boy who expressed himself with great, and at times brutal, frankness. I dare to hope that they will not hold it against him.

We hope that the notes, the appendices and the three important texts which follow the Diary, which has been reproduced as faithfully as possible, will provide the reader with all the explanations he or she will need.

Even as early as 1914, in writing and, a few years later, re-reading his Diary, Yves Congar was almost certainly thinking of the possibility of it being published. This has now happened thanks to Éditions du Cerf and the historical work of Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau.

I sincerely hope the reader will experience what I myself have felt in reading these five exceptional exercise books.

Dominique CONGAR
Paris, 15 February 1997

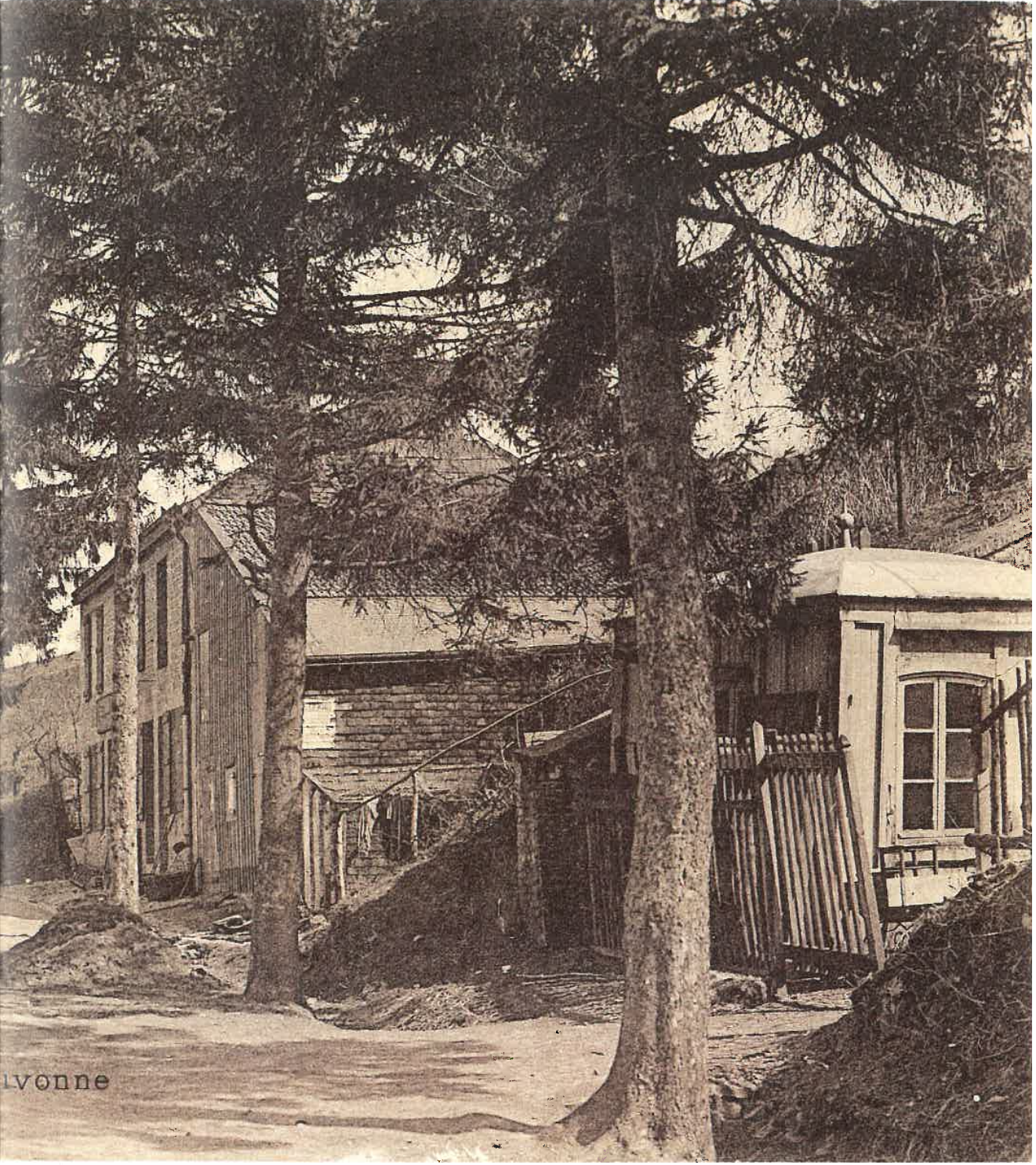
EDITORIAL NOTE TO THE FRENCH EDITION

Yves Congar's original French text
has been respected as far as possible
in transcribing it for publication.
Readers should not be surprised to see reproduced
the spelling and grammatical mistakes to be found in the original text,
written by a child aged ten in 1914
and fourteen when the war came to an end.
We have also endeavoured to respect
as far as possible the author's choice of presentation.
All the headings are also his.

Stéphane AUDOIN-ROUZEAU
Dominique CONGAR



SEDAN – Looking down Fond-de-Givonne.


Ivonne



Yves [Vonet] and Marie-Louise [Mimi] on the day they made their First Communion (Sedan, 5th June, 1914).

Diary of

the Franco-Boche War 1914-1915

by Y Congar

Illustrated with 42 drawings and 2 maps ...

from the declaration on 4th August, and even from

27th July 1914, to 27th January 1915.

[Cover of first exercise book
containing Yves Congar's Diary]

Diary of the holidays 1914

[By Y Congar][1]

(for publication)[2]

MONDAY, 27th July 1914 [3]

Today rumours of war were already in the air. A Serb had killed the son of the King of Austria and Austria wanted to declare war on Serbia. This means that Germany for its part would be fighting against France which is in alliance with Serbia.[4] The wives of military personnel were all worked up, there were queues at the banks and at the Savings Bank, people wanting to withdraw their money. Sedan was on edge on account of the false news that was making the rounds in the town. Pierre [5] was in Germany and we were worried. We did not really believe there would be war. The Military are not allowed to go further than 2 km.

Tuesday 28th July 1914

The same as Monday, but worse. Everybody is very worried and upset.

Wednesday 29th July 1914

I am not at all reassured. I can only think about war. I would like to be a soldier and fight. I believe in today's declaration[.] [W]e are going to gather pectoral flowers to make herbal tea. No news of Pierre. I have colic.

Thursday 30th July 1914.

I still have colic. Instead of going to Raucourt, I am going to Grandma's[6]. I shall sleep there. Taïe [7] is ill. The news is worse. I believe there will be war. My thoughts are all going round and round in my head. Anxiety about Pierre. People are beginning

1. Yves Congar's signature as an adult!
2. Yves Congar added his signature to all five exercise books. On the first he wrote: 'for publication'.
3. Note by Yves Congar: 'Written, I think, on 29.7.14'. The author was ten years old when he began his diary.
4. Yves Congar is referring here to the murder of the Archduke François-Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28th June, 1914.
5. Pierre Congar, an older brother aged 15, who was in Germany visiting his German pen friend.
6. The reference here is to his maternal grandmother. 'Père' designates his paternal grandfather. Without counting these two, the Congar family consisted of six people in 1914: Georges Congar, the father; Lucie (née Desoye), the mother; four children: Pierre (born in 1899), Robert (born in 1900), Marie-Louise (born in 1902) and Yves (born in 1904).
7. Pet name for Aunt Marie-Louise, who never married, and who was Georges Congar's sister.

to believe there will be war. Notes are being exchanged for gold. There is panic in Charleville. The trains are in the station ready to start. And they are beginning to call up the reservists. Sedan is neutral. The President of the Republic is back. There is talk of an interview with the Emperor of Germany on the waters of the Kiel. People are beginning to buy supplies in town. Fond de Givonne [8] is fairly quiet. We would like to arrange for Pierre to come back. Golden five-franc pieces are being given in exchange for the 10 franc ones.

Friday 31st July 1914.

A telegram has been sent to Pierre telling him to come back at once [illiquot[9]]. Tere [10] is getting in provisions. We are alright for three months with the animals, the bread and the vegetables. Motor cars and carts are being requisitioned. The 28th, the 30th and the 147th [11]are leaving for the Frontier. It is very serious. Germany has declared war on Russia[12]. The soldiers are very cheerful but not in our house. My aunt would like to come to Sedan but the increasing seriousness of the situation makes it impossible. The 91st line [regiment] is replacing the 147th.

Saturday 1st August

War has almost been declared. It is very serious. No news of Pierre. Mr Girardin has gone. All one sees is women in tears. At about 4 p.m., Madame Girardin came in tears [saying] the French are at Thionville and have been fighting since 11 a.m. It's a lie. At 4.30 p.m., trumpets were blown throughout Fond de Givonne. It was the general mobilisation. We were all afraid on account of Pierre.

Sunday 2nd August 1914.

We went to Mass although Tere was not too keen on the idea. We went to Vespers while Tere and Papa went to see if there were trains running for Pierre. We too went to see but we saw nobody. That made us all very anxious. The war is coming close.

Monday 3rd August 1914

Pierre has not returned. We are very afraid for him. It is thought that he has been unable to return. In the afternoon Grandma came and told Tere that she had good news about Pierre. Tere guessed at once that he was there with her. She went to look for

8. Part of Sedan, on the road to Belgium where Congar's parents lived. In 1914, the family lived in nº 85 Fond de Givonne, in a very large wooded property. Aunt Taie lived in the 'old house'.
9. The Latin word 'illiquot' means 'at once', without delay.
10. This is the pet name – pronounced 'Teureu' – of Yves' mother and may well be derived from an expression of Robert's who, having developed whooping cough at the age of six, called his mother 'petit rat' [little rat]. With the fits of coughing 'petit rat' became 'Tira' and thence 'Tere'. This was what everybody called Lucie until her death in 1963.
11. French army units
12. Austria declared war on Serbia on 28th July. Russia ordered a general mobilisation on the afternoon of 30th July. On 31st [July], Germany put itself on a war footing, demanded to know France's attitude in the event of war with Russia, and ordered Russia itself to call a halt to its mobilisation. On the afternoon of 1st August, both Germany and France ordered a general mobilisation, and towards evening, Germany declared war on Russia. Germany declared war on France on 3rd August, but the people of the Ardennes did not learn this until the following day. Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4th August.

him and was beside herself with joy. Pierre was hungry and tired. He went off to rest and ate and drank a lot. We were happy that day and no longer believed in the war, but it was very close just the same.

Tuesday 4th August 1914.

We went to Grandma's. Much more at ease, we set about amusing ourselves. In the evening Papa told us that war had been declared between France and Germany and that the German ambassador was leaving Paris. We made war on Hélin [13] .

Wednesday 5th August 1914

In the morning we heard the firing of a cannon. War is all one thinks about. There are 4 regiments in Sedan, the 2nd Cavalry etc. They sent 2 men to Fond de Givonne in search of accommodation for the men and the horses. In the afternoon we took in horses and the person of M. Vernier, Paris adjutant of the 2nd Cavalry military school. He is in Tere's room and his horse Ebreuil and that of his orderly, Historia, under the pump.

Thursday 6th August 1914

Germany has violated Belgian territory;[14] fierce resistance by the Belgians; bridges have been blown up; the Germans retreated northwards after having burnt down, sacked and destroyed, unremittingly etc. Skirmishes en route to Holland, whose territory was violated, after which England declared war on Germany.

Immense conflict: 10 nations shedding blood [15]; the Germans shot the mayor of Sales for having aided the French as well as a chaplain, and several Alsacians, and murdered the President of the French memorial in Metz. There are more men than usual in Metz. No news about the army.

Germany has declared war on Belgium. We spent the afternoon attacking the lads. In the evening we heard that two 15 year old boys wanting to announce that the Germans were on their tail had got themselves shot. There was a skirmish between the French cavalry and the Uhlans[16]. Among the French: no damage. Among the Uhlans: 5 deaths. The Germans have bombarded Liège, which put up a good defence. The Belgians blew up two bridges. There is dynamite underneath the bridges in Sedan. About 67 military ambulance vehicles went along the Fond de Givonne in the morning and 33 in the afternoon, Some Hussar cannons, cars from the Galeries Lafayette in Paris and buses from Paris and 2 military planes. A quiet night.

Friday, 7th August, 1914

The rest of the buses passed by during the morning, as well as two military planes. The war is still being waged in Belgium, and the Belgians seem to be winning. The English have reached Namur in Belgium. Planes are flying overhead. German ships are being stopped at sea. Some of the German ships were bombarding Bône and Philippeville [17]. Gibraltar is fortified. The Germans are bombarding Liège, which is being well defended.

13. Obscure passage: 'Hélin' could be the name of a young neighbour with whom Yves played 'a little war' with his brothers and sister.
14. German troops invaded Belgium on 4th August.
15. Nine, in fact, at that point: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxemburg.
16. Uhlan = member of a body of Prussian light cavalry originally modelled on Tatar lancers. Ten year old Yves wrote 'Hulan' instead of 'Uhlan'. [Trans]
17. Bône is now known as Annaba, and Philippeville as Skikda.