Can I have been the last of the faithful?¹

May ’68, surrealism, Dada, class-war Punks, die Grünen, Parti Communiste Français, sex and, impossibly, religion, specifically dissident Roman-Catholic theology – these, among many other items, might begin to list the influences, both to and from, Henri Lefebvre. However delectable these various items might be, my concern is Lefebvre’s continual negotiation of religion, specifically the strange ghost of Roman Catholicism and catholicity that continues to visit Lefebvre’s work. As with Althusser, the fact that by ‘religion’ Lefebvre means ecclesiology of a specific sort, that the mark of the Church in his work may be designated ‘catholicity’ in the various senses I will explore below – all of this indicates the specific situation and trajectory of Marxist intellectuals in France before and after the Second World War. Like Althusser, there is a moment of profound religious commitment and involvement that is subsequently rejected. Also like Althusser, Lefebvre was a philosopher (among other things) and member of the PCF, although he did not stay as long. But Lefebvre’s thought took a very different path, one that included mysticism, a lifelong emphasis on the theme of alienation in Marx’s work and a predilection for the

¹ Lefebvre 1991, p. 221.
Hegelian side of Marx that eventually became anathema for Althusser but found a response among the Roman Catholics themselves (much to Lefebvre’s chagrin). In fact, for all that they had in common, the two of them sit on either side of the see-saw: Althusser with his scientific, late Marx on one side and Lefebvre with his early humanist Marx, whose central idea is that of alienation, on the other.

Although I am suspicious of the trap of an assumed coherence of an individual life, almost all of Lefebvre’s work is autobiographical in some sense, especially the key text of the ‘mature’ Lefebvre, coming from the extremely influential *Critique of Everyday Life* of 1947: ‘Notes Written One Sunday in the French Countryside’. This essay will become the hub of my analysis of Lefebvre and I offer a detailed exegesis and response to it in the bulk of this chapter.

The discussion of religion that we find here, running back to ancient Greece and its festivals and then focusing on the small country church near Navarrenx in the Pyrenees, wants to know why and how the Church can have such an influence, not only in society and politics at large but especially in his own life. The essay will lead me to consider other dimensions of his thought, especially the notions of alienation, space, women and everyday life, particularly in the way they seem to undermine his virulent polemic against the Church and show up contradictions in that engagement. I will also consider Lefebvre’s distinct liking for heretical positions, including his earlier disavowed but radical mysticism, Jansenism, and the theological education he received from the dissident Roman-Catholic theologian, Maurice Blondel at the University of Aix-en-Provence.

**Threshold**

And now let us go for a moment into the little village church, surrounded by its graveyard. At first sight, Lefebvre’s rejection of the Church is more resolute than Althusser’s, his hatred more entrenched and venomous. As far as Lefebvre is concerned, the Church – and he speaks specifically of the Roman-Catholic

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3 Lefebvre 1991, p. 213.