

Lesson 3: What can the *Encyclopédie* reveal about the Enlightenment?



Story 3 – Livre Dangereux

1 June 1766, Paris, France. Francois-Jean Lefebvre de la Barre stood in front of the French
2 Parliament accused of blasphemy, crimes against the country, church and God. These were
3 some of the most serious types of crime you could commit at this time. But what had he actually
4 done? The accusations were read out in court:

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6 *One charge of failing to doff (take off) his cap as a religious procession march by.* France was
7 still a devoutly catholic country and the power of the Catholic church was still immense, everyone
8 was supposed to respect the church and those who did not were punished harshly.

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10 *One charge of "having given respect and adoration to vile and impure books that were placed
11 on a shelf in his room".* When he had been arrested for failing to respect the Church, the
12 authorities had searched his flat. They had found many books that were officially banned in
13 France for containing dangerous ideas; the same type of books we saw being shipped out to
14 other parts of Europe in Leonard Defrance de Liege's painting. These dangerous books (*livre
15 dangereux* in French) were seen as challenging the power of both the French King and the
16 Catholic Church, owning one, let alone many, was a serious crime. As a result, most authors left
17 their names off of the books and they were published anonymously.

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19 Having heard the charges against Francois-Jean, the court passed their sentence. He was to be
20 tortured and executed. He would have to crawl on his hands and knees in front of the Church of
21 Abbeville, the town he lived in, with signs hanging round his neck saying he was a blasphemer. He
22 would then have to ask for forgiveness. Following this he would have his tongue cut out, and legs
23 broken using a device called *Les Brodequins*. Finally Francios-Jean was to have his head cut off,
24 and both his body and head thrown into a fire.

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26 But it wasn't just Francois-Jean who was burned. The official judgement of the court also
27 specifically stated that one of the books was to be "thrown by the Executor of High Justice onto
28 the same pyre (fire) as the body of Lefebvre de la Barre". Some books, and the ideas in them,
29 were seen as being too dangerous to allowed to survive in 18th Century France.