**Voltaire**

Voltaire (real name François-Marie Arouet) (1694 - 1778) was a French philosopher and writer of the Age of Enlightenment. His intelligence, wit and style made him one of France's greatest writers and philosophers, despite the controversy he attracted. He was not an atheist, but he was against any and all religions that were opposed to freedom of thought. Thus he became a bitter enemy of the Catholic Church as it existed in France.

Voltaire used his works as weapons to attack any practice or tradition that he believed violated basic standards of fairness or decency. He was once quoted as saying, “to hold a pen is to be at war.” To Voltaire, the most important element of a just government was to provide for freedom of speech and the protection of a free press. He believed that for a government to function best, all ideas on issues needed to be shared and debated so that the best possible decision or viewpoint could surface and be accepted. Voltaire believed that all speech, including the expressions of ideas that were most unpopular should be protected for the sake of informed discussion and better decision making. He was also quoted as saying, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to death your right to say it.”