

Presentation of the
Franklin Delano Roosevelt Freedom Medal
to Reverend Forrest Church

Washington D.C.

April 9, 2008

On January 6, 1941, on the threshold of the most difficult and barbaric war the world had ever seen, Franklin Roosevelt issued a clarion call to humanity. Turning away from the fear that inspired the bigotry and hatred of the fascist dictatorships, FDR chose instead to appeal to the better nature of man by asking the people of all nations to embrace a world based on four essential human freedoms—Freedom of Speech and Expression, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear.

On this ninth day of April 2008, in recognition of his dedication to the principles expressed in those simple, eloquent ideals, The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Freedom Medal is awarded to

Reverend Forrest Church

Senior Minister at All Souls Unitarian Church in New York City for three decades, and today, its Minister of Public Theology, you have devoted your life tending to the frailties, strengths and miracles of the human condition. Passionate about your faith and your country, you have written or edited more than two-dozen books that speak to a people and a nation always striving to balance what you have called the twin traditions of “sacred liberty” and “divine order.” Through your ministry and your writing you have inspired us to see

ourselves as we aspire to be—lovers of reason, justice and equality who also sense something divine in the inalienable rights bestowed on each of us to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

These goals—and the on-going tensions between them—you have identified as the American Creed: that impulse to live in a nation born out of the secular wisdom of the Enlightenment, with liberty and justice for all, but guided by a higher authority that requires respect for a moral order. In your monumental work published in 2007 entitled, *So Help Me God: The Founding Fathers and the First Great Battle over Church and State*, you explore how these creative tensions shaped the character of America in the early days of our republic—and shape us still—as we work to maintain the balance between faith and reason, between order and freedom.

You have been acknowledged by scholars and historians as one of the most important liberal theologians in the United States during the last half of the 20th Century, the only pastor to be so honored. In your latest book, *Love and Death*, to be published in June, you have eloquently brought together in a single compelling volume your beliefs and teachings of the last thirty years about life, love and death. As one distinguished reviewer wrote:

“*Love and Death*, a meditation on the end of life, is really a book **about** life – a book that shows us how to love ourselves and others, how to know God, how to live. Like C.S. Lewis and Thomas Merton, Forrest Church has deepened our sense of what it means to be in the world. I read his book with inexpressible gratitude.”

These are some of the things you have written:

“Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and knowing we’re going to die.”

“Do what you can. Want what you have. Be who you are.”

“Life is a gift, not a given. Every day is a miracle.”

“Religious experience springs from two primary sources, awe and humility. Neither awe nor humility is served by those who refuse to go beyond the letter --either of scripture or of science – to explore the spirit.”

“We are more alike in our ignorance, than we differ in our knowledge.”

“ God is not God’s name. God is the name for that which is greater than all and yet present in each.”

“Whether or not there is life after death; surely there is love after death. The one thing that can never be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we die.”

“The purpose of life is to live in such a way that our lives will prove worth dying for.”

Today, Forrest Church, The Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute is privileged to honor you as a man whose life, words and deeds have illuminated and embodied the four fundamental human freedoms of which President Roosevelt spoke and that each of us cherish so dearly.

Jack Watson

April 9, 2008

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