Gregory Alan Thornbury was taking author and social critic Os Guinness back to the Memphis airport after he had visited Union University for a lecture.

“Is there anything you’d like to see in Memphis before you leave?” Thornbury asked.

“Oh yes,” Guinness replied. “I’d really like to see Graceland.”

So Thornbury and Guinness ventured to Graceland, where Thornbury gladly provided a tour of Elvis Presley’s home. It was one of the highlights of Thornbury’s life.

C. Ben Mitchell, a friend of Thornbury’s and a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, said it was a perfect match.

“He is uniquely qualified to take Os Guinness on a tour of Graceland, because he understands the world of Os Guinness and the world of Elvis equally well,” Mitchell said about Thornbury.

“Greg Thornbury is perhaps the brightest young theologian in Baptist life today,” Union University President David S. Dockery said. “His deep commitments to the church, to Baptist life, to Union University, to the orthodox Christian faith and to the vision of this institution make him an ideal person to lead the expanding work of the School of Christian Studies.”

A native of Winfield, Pa., Thornbury is the son of John Thornbury, who has been pastor of Winfield Baptist Church for 41 years. For most of his life, Thornbury expected to follow in his father’s footsteps.

“After I received my call into the ministry, that is exactly what I wanted to do — to be a preacher and pastor,” Thornbury said. “The sojourner into academics was a distantly appointed diversion.”

Thornbury graduated from Messiah College with a bachelor’s degree in communication. He earned a Master of Divinity degree and a doctorate in philosophical theology from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also completed additional doctoral studies at Oxford University’s Green College and at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School.

“It’s a deeply humbling experience to be chosen as the leading representative for what is, by any accounting, the finest undergraduate Bible and theology faculty in America,” Thornbury said. “We have a well-rounded, brilliant and culturally-engaged group of scholars here who are doing important work in the kingdom of God. To be their representative, and more broadly, a representative of Union, is an incredible opportunity and an amazing responsibility.”

Thornbury serves as senior fellow for the “Kairos Journal” and is a fellow with the Wilberforce Forum and the Research Institute for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mitchell said he expects Thornbury to excel in his new role at Union.

“I think he’s one of the true bright spots in the future of Southern Baptist intellectual life,” Mitchell said. “I hope that we will see more accessible scholarship come from Greg’s pen. His gift is, he has all of the erudition and intelligence to mine the deep things for us, but he also has the communication skills to put them at a level that are accessible to the average Christian.”

BY TIM ELLSWORTH