



U N I O N ' S
N E W E S T

Dean Thornbury

BY TIM ELLSWORTH

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.

Thornbury, 35, the newly appointed dean of Union's School of Christian Studies, is indeed comfortable operating in the worlds of theology and pop culture. He reads theological heavyweights like Carl F.H. Henry and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and he loves Bob Dylan and The Beatles.

"He comes about as close to a Renaissance man, in terms of his interests, as I know about," Mitchell said. "He plays the guitar. He reads theology. He's interested in popular culture. He goes to plays. Some would say that people like Greg are unfocused, but I would say, no, they're intellectually gregarious. That's a wonderful trait."

Thornbury's wife, Kimberly, Union's dean of students, can attest to his love for theology. They met during their time together at Messiah College, and got to know each other through their work at a local radio station. Greg was

the general manager, and Kimberly was a disk jockey.

"A lot of our dating was going through theological books," Kimberly said. "Unbeknownst to me, I think I had to pass a lot of these theological tests. Our reading list was a lot different than a lot of other couples."

Greg's strategy obviously worked. He and Kimberly have been married for 13 years and have two daughters – Katherine, 4, and Carolyn, 2.

Thornbury has been on the Union faculty since 1999, and has directed Union's Carl F.H. Henry Center for Christian Leadership since 2000.

"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 – be a preacher and pastor," Thornbury said. "The sojourn into academics was a divinely 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,

implications of the "great Christian intellectual tradition."

"Obviously, every single discipline in the university has its own unique contribution that it brings to that table," Thornbury said. "What we can do is help continue to foster that discussion. What does the great Christian intellectual tradition mean in our challenging times?"

He sees Christian colleges like Union as playing a pivotal role in how the Christian community engages the culture.

"If you think through church history, it was usually through the universities that cultural renewal and reformation got started," Thornbury said.

Thornbury has co-edited two books: "Who Will Be Saved? Defending the Biblical Understanding of God," published by Crossway Books in 2000, and "Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education," published by Broadman and Holman in 2002. He has also written dozens of articles for various journals, magazines and other publications.

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 Liberties 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." ♦



Gregory and Kimberly Thornbury with their two daughters, Carolyn and Katherine.

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 said he envisions the School of Christian Studies being a facilitator of the university's discussion and dialogue about the