



**Prof. Hugh Goddard's review of *Unexpected Grace* (2017)**

Religious conversion is always an interesting topic, whether it involves changing from membership of one religious community to another (St Paul, St Augustine), or from one branch of a religious community to another (John Wesley, John Henry Newman), and it is particularly interesting if the process which lies behind it is explained through autobiography.

This account of conversion from a Muslim background to Christianity in the context of Iran is a fascinating example of this genre, and the author who is a member of the congregation at Christ Church in Morningside, has told her story in a clear and informative way, outlining the range of factors which was responsible for her life-changing decision to be baptised into the Anglican Church in Iran in 1978.

Without giving the whole story away, the main factors involved were aesthetic (the atmosphere in a Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland, opposite to the school which she attended); cultural (an interest in English and French literature, leading to enrolling for a PhD in the University of Nottingham on 'Faith and Doubt in 19<sup>th</sup> century Poetry'); and personal (the hospitality offered, especially at Christmas time, by the Methodist university chaplaincy in Nottingham, by the Department of Theology and a local Anglican church in the same city, and by several Roman Catholic communities in connection with her PhD research).

The author also chronicles very effectively how, after a long gestation period, her encounter with a Persian-speaking expression of Christianity back in Iran, led her to join the small Christian community in her home country, under the leadership of Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti.

Just a year later, Iran underwent the Islamic Revolution, which resulted in the closure of the Department of English in which the author lectured. This led to a complete change of career, to nursing, which led to the resumption of a previous friendship, which in turn led to marriage and family life in Edinburgh, and the pursuit of many other interests such as music. The whole story is beautifully told, and the book can therefore be thoroughly recommended as an example of a remarkable 'Journey of Faith' in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.