ABSTRACT
MIRACLES AND LAWS OF SCIENCE: INSIGHTS FOR CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUE ON DIVINE ACTION FROM SAID NURSI AND THOMAS AQUINAS

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This dissertation is a work of Theology-Science dialogue and Christian-Muslim dialogue, putting Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) in conversation with contemporary debates in the wake of the Vatican Observatory-CTNS Berkeley conferences, or the Divine Action Project (DAP). This dissertation explores the question of how classical monotheists can hold coherently the coexistence of both miracles (defined as the operations of creatures in ways not anticipated by the regularities of the cosmos) and the laws of science (defined as the statistical generalizations of the regularities of the cosmos).

Generating metaphysical and epistemological questions from DAP figures, such as “How does God’s causality interact with creaturely causality in miracles?”; “Are there any principled ways by which to determine whether a miracle has occurred?”; and “Would miracles be an irrational revocation of God’s will for creatures?”; this dissertation interrogates the primary sources of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and St. Thomas Aquinas regarding these questions.

Through the interrogation of primary texts, this dissertation argues that Said Nursi’s Ash’arite, occasionalist metaphysics of divine action provides a theological approach for an anti-realism of scientific laws current in analytic philosophy. Similarly, arguing that St. Thomas’s doctrine of obediential potency presents the chief way in which the gratuity of being can be coherently incorporated into a metaphysics of miracles, akin to semi-realism about scientific laws.

After exploring the epistemological issues surrounding the practice of the sciences, this dissertation judges that each approach can be intellectually consistent with the empirical findings of the contemporary sciences, relying on contemporary treatments of the statistical generalizations of the laws of science rather than DAP assertions of the inviolability of laws of nature. The dissertation concludes with a brief treatment of the resources these approaches offer to classical monotheists attempting to dialogue with secular societies influenced by scientifically-inspired Weberian disenchantment, suggesting that each and both approaches benefit both Christianity and Islam.