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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Islamic Constitutionalism and Democracy in
Said Nursi’s *Munazarat* (1911)”

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Scholars of democratization and religious studies have long pointed out the exceptional status of Turkey as a Muslim democracy. While a generic notion of secularism is usually invoked as an explanation for Turkish success, the deeper origins of Turkish constitutionalism and democracy remain obscure. In this paper, I will present an early defense of constitutionalism and democracy by Said Nursi, the single most important religious thinker in late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey. Long before the emergence of Kemalism in Turkey, the ideas of Said Nursi generated organic support for the democratic ideal. Nursi personally became an advocate of democratic reform and justified it for the religious Muslim populace of his time. Nursi’s *Munazarat (Debates)*, published in 1911, is a rare book for its time and a pioneering defense of the compatibility of Islam and the core values of democracy. A hundred years after its initial publication - and on the occasion of its first translation into English - I will present the basic arguments of Nursi and their relevance for the contemporary democratic revolutions in the Arab world and beyond.