I thank Father Patrick Ryan for his very illuminating and informative lecture. He eloquently and succinctly reviewed the formation and development of Islamic religious education, its key institutions, and elites. In my response, I would like to focus primarily on the chief Muslim institution for advanced learning, the madrasa, which Father Ryan touched on briefly; and expand on the unique historical role of this institution in the production, preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge. I will also discuss how the establishment of western domination over the Muslim world in the nineteenth century transformed the traditional scholarly structures in Muslim societies and shaped modern Muslim perceptions of Islam and approaches to Islamic learning.

Derived from an Arabic root meaning “to learn,” the term madrasa corresponded in classical Islamic usage to institutions dedicated to instruction in Islamic religious sciences, most particularly, fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence. As Father Ryan pointed out, the emergence of a self-conscious class of scholars, known collectively as ulama, specializing in preserving and interpreting the two chief scriptural sources of Islam, namely the Quran and the Hadith, played a pivotal role in the establishment of madrasas. In addition, as Father Ryan mentioned, the consolidation of Islamic jurisprudence as the ultimate Islamic religious science stimulated the organization of formal settings for learning as well.
The madrasa first appeared in the region of Khorasan in eastern Iran in the late 10th century. It spread quickly to other parts of the Islamic world, including Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, and became the most common and distinctive Islamic institution in medieval Muslim cities. Usually built close to a large mosque, the madrasa was a building that provided space for lessons and accommodations for students. The madrasa was essentially a private institution, the activities of which were sponsored by an endowment established by a wealthy individual. Salaries for professors and other servants of the institution and stipends for students were funded by the income generated by the endowment. Although any person who was in possession of great wealth could construct a madrasa, it was mostly rulers and other members of the ruling elite who founded madrasas and donated rich endowments for their maintenance.

The language of instruction was Arabic and the main subjects taught were Islamic jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, theology, Prophetic tradition (hadith), Arabic syntax and logic. The most distinctive feature of madrasa education was its informal and personal character. In addition, the knowledge was primarily taught and transmitted through the study of texts based on oral instruction. A professor would dictate a certain text to the student, who would master it through memorization. The student would not only learn the text but also study the explanation or commentary attached to it. Madrasas did not grant degrees to graduates. Instead, if the student mastered a text satisfactorily, the teacher would grant him an ijaza, or a license which testified to the student’s qualification to teach that text. The ijaza would also list all the names of those who had transmitted the text starting with the name of its original composer.
By 1500 a set of great classical texts had been established in most of the fields of the madrasa curriculum. The rise of authoritative classical texts had a crucial impact on the production of knowledge in medieval Islam. Ulama in later medieval history usually wrote commentaries on these classical works, and as a result the number of original compositions declined. Not surprisingly, this gave the classical Islamic education a conservative character.

Besides expanding the reach and scope of Islamic learning, the proliferation of madrasas had significant social and cultural consequences as well. To begin with, the availability of financial support for students made advanced religious learning possible for larger segments of Muslim society. Likewise, the creation of sources of income for ulama outside state power not only allowed the formation of a learned class solely committed to the preservation and transmission of knowledge but also consolidated the social power of ulama as a distinct social class. In addition, the standardization of the madrasa curriculum and the emergence of a set of authoritative texts that were shared across the entire Islamic world provided intellectual cohesiveness and unity for medieval Islam. And this development played a key role in the creation of a unique Islamic culture and identity. The unifying culture of learning and the establishment of a global Muslim identity ensured the survival of Islam when the pagan Mongol armies, utterly hostile to Islam, invaded the Muslim lands in the mid-13th century and caused unprecedented destruction, including putting an end to the most important political institution of Sunni Islam, the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad (1258). Under these dire circumstances, more than anything else it was the ulama, the institution of the madrasa, and the texts inscribed
in the collective memory of scholars which kept the Islamic culture and religion alive and saved it from extinction.

The expansion of Western domination over the Muslim world in the 19th century world had a dramatic impact on Islamic society. Traditional Muslim learning was no exception. The most important effect of the establishment of western sway was the introduction and the growing dominance of secular Western knowledge. In most places in the Muslim world, this process was associated closely with the establishment of colonial rule. In their attempt to build modern state structures in their colonies, western powers introduced western systems of education and western law codes, consequently diminishing the power of the sharia and the traditional Muslim learned elites. The situation was not any different in the Muslim states which succeeded in retaining their independence throughout the nineteenth century, namely the Ottoman Empire and Iran. To be able to resist the danger of political subjugation, rulers of both states undertook westernizing reforms, especially in education. This trend continued unabated in the second half of the twentieth century when the Middle Eastern states won their independence following the Second World War.

The secularization of education, the marginalization of ulama, and the rise of new westernized intellectual elites led Muslims to review the traditional body of Islamic knowledge and seek ways to adapt it to their new context. The Muslim response can be organized into three groups: reformism, modernism, and Islamism. With origins going back to the 18th century, the reformist movement did not question the validity and eternality of Islamic knowledge. The reformists’ aim was rather to revive Islam by cleansing it of the popular beliefs and practices which they believed was not included in
the original message of Muhammad. The reformists were especially critical of Islamic mysticism and the various devotional practices associated with it, such as worshipping local saints, visiting their tombs, and seeking spiritual communion with God. They accounted for the decline in Islamic learning and religion with the internal corruption of Islamic faith and morality and wanted to revive Islam by sanitizing the inheritance of Islamic knowledge by a renewed emphasis on the primacy of the Quran and the life of His messenger as the only authentic sources of religious practice. For instance, the Deoband movement in India, which Father Ryan mentioned, was inspired by the Islamic reformist movement. Similarly, the Nur movement in Turkey, founded by the Naqshbandi shaykh Said Bediuzzaman Nursi (1873-1960), and its presently most successful offshoot led by Fethullah Gulen, also known as the Hizmet movement (which emphasizes altruism, hard work and education) can also be considered as examples of modern movements influenced by Islamic reformism.

In contrast to reformism, the modernist movement was concerned primarily with the intellectual decline in Islam and the reality of the superiority of western knowledge which they viewed as the true source of western strength. The modernist Islamic thinkers wanted to review Islamic knowledge and bring it up to par with western learning. The most prominent figures amongst the modernists were Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India, Namik Kemal of the Ottoman Empire, and the philosopher and political activist Jamal al-din Afghani, mentioned by Father Ryan. Eventually, however, the modernists came to be overtaken by the secularists who discarded the medieval heritage of Islamic knowledge completely in education and made western science, languages, and learning the only subjects of instruction in the modern secular schools they established. Here, the leading
figures were mostly 20th century secular rulers of the Muslim world, such as the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran.

In the twentieth century, Islamism became the most popular political and intellectual movement in Islam. For the Islamists, all knowledge must be subordinated to the divine revelation sent by God. As such, the Islamists view the Islamic law, *sharia*, as the only organizing principle for life and believe that it is to remain so till the End of Times. Consequently, they oppose the separation of religion and politics and support the idea that Islam should become the guiding principle for every aspect of life, including mundane affairs. Therefore they call for a complete Islamization of state institutions and the establishment of an Islamic order based on *sharia*. As far as education is concerned, they focus heavily on moral and religious education and criticize the reformists for their lack of concern for western knowledge and the modernists for their complete capitulation to it. Instead, they strive for a religious and political regeneration of the Muslim society and advocate Islamization of the western scholarly disciplines. Fields such as Islamic economics, Islamic politics, or Islamic sociology are Islamist inventions. Notable leaders of Islamism include names such as Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi of Pakistan, Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, along with its several offshoots such as Hamas in Palestine, is currently the most influential Islamist organization in the Sunni Arab world.

Although at first glance it may appear that Islamism emerged and developed as a reaction to modernization in Muslim societies, the success of Islamism should be understood within the context of modernization itself and analyzed in conjunction with the democratization of knowledge in the Islamic world. The adoption and widespread
use of print technology played a key role in this process. In particular, reformist-minded *ulama*, from the 19th century on, everywhere in the Muslim world quickly seized the opportunity provided by the new technology and put it effectively to use to disseminate Islamic knowledge, confined previously to the engagement of a small group of people in Muslim society, to the larger public so that Muslims could improve their understanding of Islamic learning and defend it against the growing encroachments of intrusive western education. Later on, the introduction of other forms of mass communication—radio, television, film, tape recording, and ultimately the internet, further intensified this process and helped the spread of Islamic knowledge to the margins of Muslim communities.

Another important step in the democratization of Islamic knowledge was the translation for the first time of the Quran, the *hadiths*, and other principal Islamic texts from Arabic into national languages. As a result, Muslims gained first hand access to the Scriptures of Islam and the works of the greatest religious authorities. In other words, they could now read the key texts of Islam on their own outside the *madrasa* institution and develop their own interpretations independently from the traditional authoritative interpretations of the *ulama*. Consequently, new interpretative frameworks, shaped by reformist, modernist and Islamist points of view, emerged to engage with the great texts of Islamic knowledge, a development which had a dramatic impact on Muslim societies and stimulated the formation of new approaches to Islam. While this process intellectually empowered individual Muslims by liberating them from the authority of the cumulative Muslim past, it weakened the role of the *ulama* as the authoritative transmitters and interpreters of Islamic knowledge and tradition. As *ulama* lost their monopolistic status over Islamic learning, a new class of lay educated Muslim thinkers
arose in the twentieth century whose teachings and leadership became the prime sources of Islamic guidance and political activism conducted in the name of Islam. For example, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a teacher who had studied at the teachers’ college in Cairo; so was Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) of Egypt, the most influential Islamist thinker of the twentieth century whose ideas proved crucial for the formation of Jihadist movements, including the notorious Al-Qaeda. Its founder Usama bin Laden, who would often issue fatwas in the image of traditional ulama, in fact did not have any traditional Islamic education. He was a businessman trained only in western-style schools. His successor Ayman al-Zawahiri is also a product of modern, western education. Before joining Jihadist groups, Zawahiri was a promising medical doctor.

As the Islamic world struggles today with growing jihadist violence, the most important question preoccupying Muslims and non-Muslims alike is whether the ideas and activities of jihadists can be substantiated by Islamic principles. Or, to what extent do the jihadists represent Islam and in what ways do they draw on the Islamic tradition? Based on this brief discussion, we can firmly state that Jihadism is nothing but a ferocious rebellion against the inherited Islamic knowledge and tradition and no doubt it aims to destroy it in such a way that neither the Mongols nor the enlightened western and westernized elites could ever do.