Before we can address the long-standing discussion among Jesuits and their lay colleagues on the nature of Ignatian mission and ministry it would be useful, I think, to share with you how a believing scientist like myself views, based on scientific knowledge, the nature of God and the nature of the human being. Obviously such knowledge is basic to any discussion of Ignatian mission and I would hope that such knowledge will help to compliment that derived from philosophy and theology.

It is clear from all of the sciences, including geology, molecular biology, paleontology, comparative anatomy, cosmology, etc., that evolution is an intrinsic and proper characteristic of the universe. Neither the universe as a whole nor any of its ingredients can be understood except in terms of evolution. We human beings came to be through evolution and evolution is a daily happening. As the universe expanded from the Big Bang and evolved, stars were born and stars died. Since stars are born and sustain themselves by creating a thermonuclear furnace whereby light elements are continuously converted into heavier elements, when they die the stars pour out to the universe these heavier elements. And then a second generation of stars is born, not now of pure hydrogen but of the enriched chemistry of the universe. Thus, the universe is being continuously enriched with heavier elements. This process continued until through chemical complexification the human being came to be. Our sun is a third generation star and we are literally born of stardust.

All that I have presented thus far about the evolution in the universe of complex organisms, including ourselves, has occurred by natural processes intrinsic to a universe which is about 14 billion years old and contains about $10^{22}$ stars. Thus far science, even though no scientist would claim to have the ultimate truth about any of this. But what relevance does all of this scientific knowledge have to Ignatian mission and ministry?

Although God transcends the universe, he is working in it through his providence and continuous creation. This stress on God’s immanence is not to place a limitation upon God. Far from it. It reveals a God who made a universe that has within it a certain dynamism, as seen by science, and thus
participates in the very creativity of God. In such wise God emptied himself so that he could share his infinite love with his creation.

To my mind this view of the evolutionary universe and of our place in it, derived at least partially from the sciences, and of God’s role in the universe, derived from the reflections of a religious believer upon that same science, may help us in a further understanding of Ignatian mission. We, in a special way, share in the creativity which God desired the universe to have. I have not spoken above of the spiritual nature of the human being because that cannot be an object of scientific research. But the reflections of a religious believer upon the nature of God and his relationship to the universe brings us undoubtedly to a recognition of our spirituality; in fact such reflections are themselves an exercise of that spirituality.

Reflections upon our scientific knowledge of the universe bring us to a recognition of our role as co-creators, so to speak, in God’s continuous creation of the universe. Ignatian mission is, therefore, not a choice taken independently of the world around us; it derives from our very nature in the universe. It cannot be separated from faith, our relationship of love to God, the source of all missions, of all creativity in the universe. Furthermore, it appears to me that the Jesuit identity expressed by St. Ignatius’ vision of Jesuits as contemplatives in action is reinforced by our reflections on the nature of the universe. Co-creators on mission in the universe can only realize their mission if they are constantly united to God, the source of all missions. Jesuit identity is much more than what Jesuits do. It is bound intimately to the very nature of the universe which drives us as co-creators to the carry out our mission in union with the Creator.

Father General Pedro Arrupe concretized these fundamental considerations about mission when in his “Jesuit Mission in the University Apostolate” he said:

Our Lord’s teaching is to be the salt that penetrates and sustains the vitality of human cultures. Now many human cultures, specially in the modern, technological world, are shaped in institutions of higher education. In these institutions, then, we are offered an unrivalled opportunity, where the graces of civilization flourish, for the grace of God to abound the more. ... How will they become wise in Christ, if Christian scholars are not present in their world of contemporary philosophy, science, or art and at home, even more so, in that world which evoked Paul’s lyrical cry, “How great are God’s
riches. How deep are his wisdom and knowledge. Who can explain his
decisions? Who can understand his ways?" (Rom. 11/33)

What would be some of the characteristics of Ignatian mission derived from
religious reflections on the evolutionary nature of the universe and
concretized by Father Arrupe?

Ignatian mission is a participation in the intrinsically missionary nature
of the Church, the concrete presence of the Creator among his co-creators.
God is continually encountering the world in new and creative ways because
the world he created is responsive to his continual encounter. Ignatius sent his
men into that world and sought to free them of any encumbrance to a free
and total commitment to the world in whatever way their talents would best
serve the Church. And their mission was to evolve just as the universe itself is
in evolution. But for any individual Jesuit or Jesuit institution the evolution of
mission must be in consort with the intrinsically missionary Church. The
wisdom of God in emptying himself to create a world which shares in his
creativity requires that, since God is the one God of all creation, such
participation in his creativity must be universal. It cannot favor any particular
social, cultural, religious movement. While to function any given mission must
be limited, it cannot be exclusive.

Ignatius was fond of seeing himself as a pilgrim. The early history of the
Society reinforces this notion of the early Jesuits as a group of pilgrims. We
are, indeed, pilgrims in a universe never envisaged by Ignatius and his
companions. And yet we are on a mission in this universe among all of our
fellow pilgrims.

Our attempts to understand the universe have as much to say about
ourselves as they do about the universe. In fact, in us the universe has become
self-reflective. In our reflections we are increasingly aware that we are part of
that upon which we are reflecting. Today, as we attempt, with the use of the
most advanced methods of physics and mathematics, to understand ourselves
and the universe of which we are a part, we realize that we stand on the
shoulders of giants of the past and that the path to our present day
understanding has been a long one, relative to a human lifetime, but a very
short one, relative to the age of the universe itself, and that it has been
travelled by many. We are today's pilgrims, aware of what lies behind us, but
impatient to know what lies ahead.
Science has undoubtedly been one of the principal factors in determining the direction of our pilgrimage. In reflecting upon our scientific knowledge and in attempting to unify it with all that we know as human beings we sense that we are being led in our pilgrimage to realities beyond understanding and that our passion to know is really a participation in Love. It is remarkable that science has brought us to this.