

From the July 4, 2010 Issue

Panayiotis Nellas on Jesus' Mission

Why did the Son of God become the man Jesus? Most of us have been trained in a form of Christianity that answers this question from a perspective first described in detail by St. Augustine, then expounded in Medieval Theology and handed on to us by the Reformers. This “Western” perspective says that the Son became human because of our sin. This perspective minimizes the Bible’s teaching on the Father’s plan of Adoption (Eph. 1:5). In the quote below the Greek Orthodox theologian Panayiotis Nellas describes the negative results of this truncated view of Jesus’ Mission:

. . [negative] consequences followed also from Augustine’s axiom that “if many had not perished, the Son of Man would not have come.” [Enchiridion viii, 27-ix, 29.] This trapped Christ, and by extension the Christian life and the realities of the Church, the sacraments, faith and the rest, within the bounds defined by sin. Christ in this perspective is not so much the creator and recapitulator of all things, the Alpha and Omega as Scripture says, but simply the redeemer from sin. The Christian life is regarded not so much as the realization of Adam’s original destiny, as a dynamic transformation of man and the world and as union with God, but as a simple escape from sin. . . The Church forgets her ontological bond with the world. And the world, seeing that its positive aspects are not appreciated within the Church, feels a sense of alienation and breaks off relations with it.

From: *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, by Panayiotis Nellas, p. 95. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997.