Ratzinger’s ecumenical interests are genuine and based on personal acquaintance. Two of his more noted former doctoral students are the Greek Orthodox bishops Damaskinos Papandreou and Stylianos Harkianakis; both currently metropolitans of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

After the publication of *Dominus Jesus*\(^1\) in 2000, the Orthodox Church inquired whether Rome recognizes Orthodoxy as “Church” in the full sense of the word, or whether Rome reserves the full predication “Church” exclusively for the Roman Catholic Church. In response, Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, replied that the Roman Catholic Church feels herself “wounded” by the lack of unity between the two Churches.\(^2\)

Seven years later the head of the Moscow patriarchate’s section for external affairs, Metropolitan Cyril of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and presently the Patriarch of Russia, penned the foreword to the Russian edition of Ratzinger’s classic *Introduction to Christianity* closing with the wish: “May it lead to a fruitful collaboration in the proclamation of Christian values. Precisely this spirit of fidelity to our common roots permeates Pope Benedict XVI’s book.”\(^3\) After years of reciprocal alienation and suspicion, the last forty years have witnessed a remarkable rapprochement between these two largest Christian denominations. The fact that a significant official representative of the Orthodox world authored laudatory words about a Western theological classic, words that were intended for a predominantly Russian-Orthodox readership, is a noteworthy milestone.\(^4\)

Also in 2007, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios I from Constantinople wrote an introduction to *Jesus of Nazareth*. Fully in agreement with Ratzinger, the patriarch maintains knowledge of Jesus Christ grows most significantly through a personal relationship, sustained by a love for Christ that is not limited to mere sentiments and their corresponding expressions. Reason “entering” the heart prevents sentimentality from developing.

The solution can only be the recognition that, in and of itself, human efforts cannot give unity to a body that is neither political nor ethnic in nature but is the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Unity is a gift granted by Christ to his Church. The Church has a divine origin. Such “a unity from
above” does not ignore existing theological or spiritual differences. Yet, by concentrating on the essence of faith, Jesus Christ, and therefore on the center of faith, one allows Christ to effect ecumenical unity so that he may bring about one Christendom anew. In a noted letter written in 1986 for the periodical Theologische Quartalschrift, Ratzinger argued Christianity cannot be defined merely by “activities,” lest its contours become hazy. Such a definition cannot bring about lasting unity and the desired constancy of ecclesial life. It merely involves stumbling from one activity or platitude to another. The Church—and this includes all efforts toward ecumenical unity—is not the outgrowth of human pressure for success. To achieve ecumenical unity, what is required is to allow unengineered, unexpected events to become the stages of a foundation for unity. Ratzinger does not plead for passivity in ecumenical matters but rather for Christians of all denominations to collaborate with God and allow God to achieve such unity under his conditions.

In this sense, one should cherish reading God’s Word together, the conciliar texts leading to the profession of faith in the triune God, in Jesus Christ as true God and true man, as well as reflecting on the nature of baptism and the remission of sins. The Decalogue (The Ten Commandments) can be read from a New Testament perspective. Thus, a basic image of God emerges that is common to many human beings. Such insights need to be lived, publicly acknowledged, and constantly deepened. This reaches a high-point in joint prayer. In the process “a new wealth of listening and understanding develops” leaving behind misunderstandings and pointless polemics. Turning together to the Lord and praying the psalms are sources for hope. Such prayerful Trinitarian koinonia (communion) in the Father and his Son and in the Holy Spirit enables all participants to experience community as wrought by the third person of the Blessed Trinity. Such prayer in turn also leads to a deeper scholarly understanding of the Christian faith. Thus, ecumenical progress is achieved not by spectacular statements or events, but by listening to the subtle language of God and by appreciating that the human condition and human reason are God’s gifts to humankind so that it might reach God within the contingent parameters of immanence.

According to Ratzinger, the goal of all ecumenical efforts is the transformation of the separated confessional Christian denominations into authentic particular Churches, each embodying the one Catholica. He rejects three hypotheses. It would be shortsighted to believe that merely a popular movement from below, ignoring theological research and the ordained ministry, could be successful. Likewise, he rejects the notion that unity among Church leaders alone—based on their ordination—could establish Church unity. In his judgment, this was the nature of the pioneering attempt made by Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner in 1983. This suggestion allows too much authority to bishops and the pope. It flies in the face of the concepts of the priesthood of the laity and the true nature of the Catholic ministerial priesthood; unity must be prayed for (erbetet werden). A third model he rejects is one that simply accepts every Christian practice in and of itself as a valid tradition without subjecting it to a theological analysis, thereby bypassing the testimonies of scripture and apostolic tradition. Genuine ecumenical progress, Ratzinger argues, can only be achieved if all three elements collaborate. The conscious