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**BEDFORD** – An accomplished researcher of the Vatican predicted that the pontificate of Benedict XVI would usher in a period of reform in the Catholic Church as significant as that seen in the 40 years since the Second Vatican Council.

Speaking at a Friday night fundraiser at C.R. Sparks for Holy Family Academy in Manchester, Robert Moynihan said it will be up to young people such as the students at the school to carry out the vision of the Pope into next half-century.

He said some Catholics were under the false impression that the Second Vatican Council had created a new church. Some misunderstood the purpose of small changes to church discipline, such as ending the rule against eating meat on Fridays.

"It opened up to them the possibility of thinking everything is up for grabs, everything can be changed," Moynihan said.

The council, held in the 1960s, is perhaps most famous for making the so-called Latin Mass a supposed thing of the past. But Benedict has restored the Tridentine Mass as an extraordinary rite of the church that may be celebrated in any parish without permission of the local bishop, though not as often as the Vatican II Mass.

"The church is ever ancient, even though it is ever new," Moynihan said. "We must have the ever ancient part woven back into this new part."

Moynihan, the editor of Inside the Vatican magazine, who has interviewed Benedict more than 20 times, described the Pope as a man with a ready smile and a deep sense of humor who could relate to the German intellectual as easily as he could to a Bavarian peasant.

Before his election to Pope, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wanted to retire to a monastery and write books, said Moynihan.

"Benedict is perhaps the most intelligent of all the people I have met in my life," he said.

Moynihan praised Holy Family Academy as a model Catholic school, following the standards set by the Pope.

The school, he said, has a mission even more important than that of teaching students math, science, literature and language.

"These are the educational activities of the school," Moynihan said. "It's the secondary purpose after the encounter with Christ."

Speaking at what was a fundraiser for scholarships, salaries and building repairs, Moynihan said supporting schools such as the 72-student Holy Family Academy is all the more crucial because the church has been losing an average of one school a week for the past 40 years -- a total of about 2,000.

Those that remain, he said, are at the crossroads in conflict between a culture of life and faith and one of death and disbelief.

"They are the lonely lighthouses in the midst of a vast encompassing secularization," Moynihan said.

Holy Family Academy has students in Grades 7 through 12. It has earned national recognition for its high academic standards and devotion to Catholic education, twice earning a spot on the Catholic High School Honor Roll.

This was the second fundraiser for the school held at C.R. Sparks. Last year, Holy Family Academy hosted the Rev. Benedict Groeschel, a popular Catholic author and speaker and personality on EWTN.