

# WORLD YOUTH DAY DRAWS CRITICS

Over the summer, a crowd of roughly one million gathered in Madrid for World Youth Day. Pilgrims, mostly teenagers, arrived for one week to celebrate the Catholic faith and to gain inspiration from Pope Benedict XVI. Against the backdrop of this overwhelming support—from all over the globe—were some enemies of the pope, as well as those who said the event would cost too much. Europa Laica (Secular Europe) was actually more principled than the other critics: it wants to scrub society clean of religion, thus its opposition.

Those who opposed World Youth Day for economic reasons—including a group of 120 priests—were not convincing. The number crunchers said it would cost between \$72 and \$86 million to accommodate the crowd, maintaining it was too expensive given Spain's dire economic condition. They needed to go back to their calculators and tally the revenues that the event was predicted to spawn.

For example, if a million young people spent an average of \$20 per day, over seven days that would generate \$140 million. Moreover, this is gravy: 80 percent of the cost of the event would be paid for by the pilgrims; Catholic non-profit companies and corporations would pick up the rest of the tab.

Still, the critics weren't satisfied. They blamed the corporations which contributed to World Youth Day for their current economic condition. Yet one of the largest corporate donors was Coca-Cola, and it has a foundation in Madrid that promotes, among other things, economic development. Indeed, it specifically targets Spanish youth in areas ranging from the arts to science.

Pope Benedict XVI did not only delight young people from all over the world, he gave them the kind of spiritual inspiration that no one else could deliver. Moreover, as a byproduct of

his presence, he generated more cash into the Spanish economy than any event his austerity-minded critics could ever stage.