

OBAMA NEEDS A REALITY CHECK

A couple of weeks ago, President Obama spoke at the Catholic-Evangelical Leadership Summit on Overcoming Poverty at Georgetown University.

Much of what President Obama said about poverty was insightful and accurate, but he made some statements that deserve a rejoinder.

President Obama clearly understands, intellectually, the need for character formation and the role that values play in accounting for social mobility. Why, then, hasn't he promoted policies that address these issues? Because his real interest is not fighting poverty, or growing the economy, it's fighting inequality.

Inequality can be resolved either by providing programs that allow those at the bottom to rise or developing tax schemes that punish those at the top. Obama has chosen the latter route, which explains, in part, why the poverty rate has increased during his tenure. Ironically, inequality has also increased under his watch: low interest rates, which is a signature of his administration, bolsters the equities market, making the rich richer.

Obama took the occasion to criticize Catholics and Protestants who are more concerned about abortion than poverty. Yes, Mr. President, the most fundamental civil right is the right to be born—it is not the right to eat. Just as important, the research overwhelmingly shows that conservatives (those associated with the pro-life wing of Christianity) are more generous to the poor than liberals (the social justice wing). So his side is neither compassionate to the unborn nor charitable to the needy.

It was remarkable to hear Obama say that we should not “buy the idea that the poor will always be with us and there's

nothing we can do.” Who is the “we”? What has *he* done about it? He spoke throughout the conference as if he was just another one of the academics on the panel. He has been president for six-and-a-half years and there are more poor people today—they are disproportionately African American—than when he took office. Obama desperately needs a reality check.