Francis Collins is a physician-geneticist currently serving as the Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at the National Institutes of Health. In this role, he oversees a complex multidisciplinary project to map and sequence the entire human genome and to determine aspects of its function. In 1989, Dr. Collins’ research group identified the gene for cystic fibrosis. This was followed up by his success in identifying the gene for neurofibromatosis in 1990 and a collaborative effort which pinpointed the gene for Huntington’s disease in 1993. His own research laboratory is now vigorously exploring the genetic basis of adult-onset diabetes, breast and prostate cancer, and other disorders. As leader of the International Human Genome Sequencing Consortium, Dr. Collins announced the completion of a “working draft” of the human genome in June 2000 and published a first analysis of its meaning in February 2001.

David Fletcher is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, where he has served as Department Chair and currently teaches bioethics, applied social ethics, and ethical theory. He helped found the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College and currently chairs the Center’s steering committee. A Fellow of The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, Dr. Fletcher serves on the board of the Center’s journal, Ethics & Medicine. He has authored and co-authored numerous publications on bioethics, Christian ethics, moral theology and philosophy and has contributed to such large-volume works as the Nelson Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers). He has recently been interviewed by U.S. News and World Report, the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times and participated in a cable television discussion on human cloning.

Robert Kingsbury is the Medical Director of SSM Hospice in St. Louis, Missouri. He is a board certified physician who in 1984 founded the St. Joseph’s Health Center hospice program in St. Charles. Dr. Kingsbury is also a founding member of the Academy of Hospice Physicians and is an executive committee member of the Commission for choppy International. The organization currently exists to help form hospice units in Athens, Greece. In addition, Dr. Kingsbury served as President of the Christian Medical & Dental Society from 1991-1993 and was a medical missionary in West Africa from 1965-1973. An advocate for the poor and the dying, Dr. Kingsbury believes that a central goal of medicine is to relieve suffering by helping people to die with comfort, support and meaning. Through his work, he expresses concern for the spiritual, emotional and physical well being of dying patients.
It is amusing that the offending content is held by some to be unquestioning endorsement of traditional values – especially such values as individualism, respect for life, or the autonomy of the family – while it is held by others to be a pernicious undermining of those same values.

Such irony remains today. While Wesley Smith objects that there is a “bioethics ideology” that is at odds with traditional values, bioethicist Gregory Pence laments that bioethicists are overly cautious morally, and that their work “is often too simplistic, even sensational.” He faults bioethicists for such things as “insisting on Olympian standards” for new technologies and the motivation of those who will use them, demonizing new inventions, distrustingly the motivations of everyday people and failing to advocate change. He charges that practitioners of bioethics often react to innovations in biotechnology with “knee-jerk reactions” (January 12, 2001 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education). Pence looks at the same field as does Smith, but where Smith sees rigid conformity to radicalism, Pence sees cautious conservatism.

Contrary to being monolithic, bioethics is in fact a field open to contributions from those with diverse insights. My own observation is that while there are indeed strong anti-traditional voices in bioethics, the voices of those who uphold human dignity and who reflect traditional and biblical values are also being heard. There is now a much greater acceptance of bioethical engagement from explicitly Christian perspectives; some authors write from a philosophical perspective, while others base their work in moral theology. Following the cloning of Dolly the sheep, prominent religious ethicists such as Gilbert Meilaender, Jr.; Stanley Harakas; Edmund Pellegrino; and Leon Kass delivered eloquent testimonies against human cloning before the National Bioethics Advisory Commission. In addition to the work being done by scholars connected to The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, its European counterparts – The Linacre Center for Health Care Ethics, The Centre for Bioethics and Public Policy and the Lindeboom Institute for Medical Ethics – have also influentially entered into today’s bioethical debates. Leading secular bioethics journals, such as the Hastings Center Report, are more likely than before to give serious attention to issues of faith, spirituality and the religious dimensions of health care. Explicitly Christian perspectives on bioethical issues are being published in a variety of places, including journals such as Ethics & Medicine and Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality. Bioethics books, conferences and other initiatives are also increasingly rooted in Christian perspectives.

As the field of bioethics continues to evolve, the philosophical confidence in the foundations of ethical theory are being challenged as never before in our lifetime. I believe that there has never been a better time to influence the direction of bioethics by mounting a strong challenge to the Kevorkians and Singers of the field. Christians should be devoted to shaping the world of bioethics as it continues to morph and change in the twenty-first century.