



# GOD'S TEN COMMANDMENTS:

A Way of Life, Rediscovered

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# GOD'S TEN COMMANDMENTS: WORDS FOR LIFE

A PASTORAL INTRODUCTION BY  
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTIAN LÉPINE

## DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Deep within every human life there is a longing for direction, for what can light the way ahead. In moments of joy and in seasons of trial alike, we seek what can guide us, sustain us, and anchor our lives in something lasting. The Ten Commandments speak directly to that longing. They are given to us as a blueprint for life.

This reflection takes on a particular richness within the context of *the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal*, which I am glad to support alongside its President, Professor David Bensoussan, and its President Emeritus, Professor Jean Duhaime. The Decalogue is a shared spiritual inheritance, and it carries within it a genuine call to all of humanity. Across our differences of opinion, belief, and culture, it reminds us that we each carry the same inherent dignity.

It invites us to recognize the worth of every person, our own as much as that of the other. Life-giving words, the Commandments are rooted in an essential truth: each of us is made to be loved and to love, to love God and to love one's neighbour.

Far from being external rules imposed upon us, they speak to who we are and to what we are called to become. They point to an inward path, revealing our deepest purpose and helping us to live with integrity.

These Commandments are an expression of God's love for humanity. Through that love, God helps us to understand our own identity and invites us into a way of life faithful to our truest selves.

Understood in this light, the Commandments become not a constraint but a living truth to be rediscovered anew each day, an essential compass for living. They help us to live more fully and to walk along a path of truth, respect, and love.

It is in that spirit that this brochure offers a series of personal reflections. Four contributors share, each in their own voice, what speaks to them most deeply in the Decalogue. Together, their reflections bring these ancient words to life, words that remain, today, as timely and as full of promise as ever.

Each contributor is a member of the *Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal*, an organization established in 1971 through the initiative of Archbishop Paul Grégoire and Rabbi Alan Langner, then President of the Montreal Board of Rabbis. They include: **Martina McLean**, Catholic representative of the Archdiocese of Montreal; **Professor David Bensoussan**, of the Jewish tradition, Faculty of Science at *Université du Québec*; ; and **Professor Emeritus Jean Duhaime**, who taught Biblical Interpretation at the *Université de Montréal* from 1976 to 2013. We are also honoured to include a reflection by **Rabbi Michael Whitman**.

May these words nourish our reflection and rekindle in each of us the desire to rediscover God's Ten Commandments as a genuine path of life.



† **Christian Lépine**  
Archbishop of Montreal

## **A TIMELY READING OF THE DECALOGUE**


In a world where moral landmarks can seem increasingly uncertain, the Decalogue continues, in my view, to spark reflection and dialogue. It offers an approach that is both structured and compellingly relevant to our times.

What stands out immediately is its internal coherence. The Decalogue is not simply a catalogue of restrictions: it unfolds in two complementary parts. The first five commandments address the relationship between the human person and the Creator, while the last five revolve around human relationships. This structure reveals an all-encompassing vision of human existence, one in which the spiritual and the social are intimately bound together.

I am particularly drawn to how the commandments on human relationships unfold. These begin with the prohibition of covetousness — one that speaks directly to what lies within us — before moving outward to external acts: false witness, theft, adultery, and finally murder. This progression shows that the worst of human behaviour often stems from desires left unchecked. In my view, this is what makes the Decalogue a genuine foundation of universal morality, grounded in respect for others.

The first commandments introduce a dimension of transcendence. They call us to consider a reality beyond ourselves: faithfulness to God, reverence for his name, the sanctification of time, and honour for parents. I see them as more than religious requirements, but as cornerstones for a vision of human dignity. If life commands respect, it is because it carries within it a higher dimension.

This conviction is reflected in the Book of Proverbs (20:27), where the human spirit is described as a "lamp of the Lord." Our relationships with one another, then, are grounded not only in social norms, but in a deeper understanding of who we are.



The Decalogue also opens onto broader biblical principles — the call to love one's neighbour, to turn toward God with one's whole heart. It is not a fixed text that speaks only to its time, but a doorway to a wider ethic, one that encompasses our relationship to ourselves, to others, and to what transcends us.

In practical terms, these commandments inform our daily choices. They remind us that life is woven from these decisions, sometimes straightforward, sometimes far-reaching, each one an exercise of our free will. They call us to uphold the dignity of every person, and this demands honesty and respect not only in our deeds, but in our words and our intentions.

If we imagine a world where these principles are lived out fully, we would see more justice, more compassion, and greater accountability prevail. They offer a framework for reconciling freedom and moral obligation: we are free, but that freedom always comes with a responsibility toward others.

In the end, the Decalogue strikes me as something far richer than a set of commandments. It offers a genuine way of living more fully in the world, one that integrates interior life, social responsibility, and spiritual growth. The values it embodies, rooted in the memory of the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai, continue to shed light on contemporary moral thought and to nourish life in community.

These ancient texts retain, in my view, a remarkable staying power: they invite each of us to examine our actions, our intentions, and the purpose we choose to give to our lives.

**Mr. David Bensoussan**

Professor, Faculty of Science, Université du Québec  
President, Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal

## THE DECALOGUE: A CHARTER OF FREEDOM FOR OUR TIMES


The Decalogue — or the Ten Commandments — is often seen as a list of prohibitions. For my part, I see something far deeper: a call to live freely and to preserve that freedom over time.

To understand it well, we must return to its original context. The Commandments were given immediately after the liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. This is fundamental. God does not begin by imposing rules: he first presents himself as liberator — **"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"** (Exodus 20:2). The Commandments thus emerge as a path toward freedom.

In my view, they are not constraints but a guide to keep us from falling back into a form of slavery. The first commandments, in particular, invite us to refuse idols. Today these take many forms: anything that consumes our energy, shapes our choices, and draws us away from what is truly good for us. Similarly, not using God's name in vain means not reducing God to our own ideas or using him for our own ends.

The commandments addressing human relationships follow the same logic. From respect for parents to the rejection of violence, falsehood, and covetousness, they lay the foundations for a society where each person can live in freedom. These markers, simple as they may appear, form the essential fabric of life in community. We might even recognize in them an early form of a charter of rights and freedoms.

These commandments are fundamentally about responsibility. Expressed most often in the negative — "You shall not steal," "You shall not kill" — their deeper call is to a positive way of living. Not stealing, for example, means not only refraining from taking what belongs to others, but also caring actively for the needs of others. If someone is hungry and I can help, then I am called to do so. The Decalogue thus invites us to solidarity and service.



Today, these commandments remain as timely as ever. They can serve as a steady compass for our choices. Faced with the many modern "idols" — success, power, image, performance — they help us discern what truly leads to freedom.

At the heart of it all lies one essential conviction: human dignity. The "neighbour" does not refer only to those close to us, but to every human being, created in the image of God. Each person bears the divine within them. This vision calls us to respect every person without distinction or discrimination.

Far from being a text of the past, the Decalogue strikes me as a message for our times. It does not limit freedom: it defines what freedom requires. It does not close off possibilities: it opens a path to living fully, with others, in respect and dignity.

**Mr. Jean Duhaime**

Professor Emeritus of Biblical Interpretation, Université de Montréal  
President Emeritus, Christian–Jewish Dialogue of Montreal

## **FROM PRINCIPLES TO LIVING ACTIONS: REDISCOVERING THE DECALOGUE**


For many, the Ten Commandments may initially appear as a series of directives. Yet, upon reflection, they reveal themselves as something far deeper: universal principles rooted in a rich tradition of moral reflection and divine revelation. In the Book of Exodus, God speaks to Moses, and these words—simple, direct, and powerful—stand as a lasting foundation for human life.

At their core, they offer a moral compass, providing a clear framework for organizing life in society. Teachings such as “You shall not kill” or “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour” are not merely prohibitions—they safeguard life, truth, and trust. Without them, the fabric of human relationships begins to unravel.

The Decalogue rests on two essential dimensions: our relationship with God, and our relationship with others—as neighbours, citizens, and members of a shared humanity. Together, they form a coherent vision of life grounded in respect, justice, and responsibility.

These teachings point toward what is necessary for the common good: respect for life, honesty, fidelity, and freedom from destructive desires such as jealousy. They remind us that our actions affect not only ourselves, but also the wider community, helping to build trust and sustain peaceful coexistence.

For Christians, the commandments are not isolated moral obligations. They are fulfilled and deepened in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. When He calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves, He brings these principles to life. In the Sermon on the Mount, and particularly in the Beatitudes, we see them embodied in humility, mercy, compassion, the pursuit of justice, and the call to be peacemakers.



This invites us to move from principle to action. Beyond guiding what we avoid, they call us to examine our hearts and intentions. For example: “You shall not kill” becomes a question of how we respond in moments of tension: do we choose anger that harms, or patience that builds? “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour” challenges us to consider the impact of our words on the dignity of others.

There is a constant interplay between what is given and how it is lived. These teachings invite ongoing self-examination and lead toward an interior transformation that shapes both character and conduct. In doing so, they allow our lives to become a witness that can inspire others.

In a world where many feel disoriented, returning to these foundational principles is more important than ever. They have shaped major ethical frameworks throughout history, and without them, we risk losing the basis for living well together.

Ultimately, they call us back to what is essential: to love God, to love others, and to be transformed by that love. Guided by faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and following the example of Christ, we are invited not only to understand these commandments—but to embody them.

**Martina McLean**

Director, Office for English Pastoral Services and  
Assistant to the Episcopal Vicar for the English-speaking Faithful

## 10(?) COMMANDMENTS


When God speaks at Mount Sinai, according to the biblical narrative, and introducing God to the Jewish People and all humanity for the first time and for all time, why does God identify as the One who took the Jewish People out of Egypt (Exodus 20:2) and not the One who created heaven and earth? Surely creating heaven and earth is a more majestic and apt description.

We refer to this passage as the Ten Commandments, one of the most influential collections of words in the history of mankind, words that hold special meaning for all faiths. But does this passage actually contain ten commandments?

The Biblical text nowhere refers to this passage as the Ten Commandments (this phrase is only used later), though the Torah does refer to this passage as *Aseret HaDevarim* (Ten Statements). The answer hinges on whether the first statement, "I am the Lord your God..." is a commandment to believe in God, according to Nachmanides, or an introduction to the next nine statements/commandments, according to Maimonides.

As an introduction, this statement makes the case for why we should obey the commandments that follow. And God's answer is not that he created heaven and earth and is therefore all-powerful, making his commandments obligatory on us, though we may believe this is all true. Rather God's appeal is based on the value that comes to us from observing the commandments.

Through this story, God tells us: I took you out of slavery, I saved you from harm, I care about you, I love you more than you will ever know; every commandment I give you is a continuation of that care and love, to make your life better, more meaningful, and more holy.



Sometimes observing commandments seems like a burden, a chore. But this foundational phrase teaches us that in fact it is a gift, an opportunity. The challenge is to see that gift in our everyday lives, even when we are distracted, stretched thin, and pulled in many directions.

There are many Biblical commandments that are common to all of us, and many that are unique to our own faiths. Please consider: Do you experience a commandment primarily as an act that gives glory to God, or primarily as an act that adds value to your life — and if the latter, how do you maintain that feeling when the commandment seems burdensome, or meaningless?

**Rabbi Michael Whitman**