

How the Ten Commandments are seen in Modern Canadian Law

John Warren Reynolds

Oligochaetology Laboratory, 9-1250 Weber Street East, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2A 4E1 and Research Associate, New Brunswick Museum, 277 Douglas Avenue, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada E2K 1E5

Received: 02.02.2026 | Accepted: 27.02.2026 | Published: 01.03.2026

*Corresponding Author: John Warren Reynolds, Ph.D., LL.B.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18822318](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18822318)

Abstract

Original Research Article

The Ten Commandments, originating as biblical ethical directives, have profoundly influenced Western legal thought, though they are not codified as a singular statute within Canadian law. Their principles resonate in criminal law, family law, property protections, and historical moral legislation. This manuscript explores the parallels between the Decalogue and Canadian statutory law, emphasizing both historical enactments and contemporary legal philosophy, while providing full statutory citations and referencing authoritative sources in accordance with the Harvard style.

Keywords: Ten Commandments, Modern Canadian Law, legal citations.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Introduction

Canada's legal framework is secular, drawing upon Judeo-Christian moral traditions historically embedded in common law [Allen, 2002; McDowell, 2011; Law Shun, 2025]. Although the Ten Commandments are not directly enforceable, their ethical imperatives underpin legal norms relating to life, property, truthfulness, and familial responsibilities. This paper examines statutory analogues, historical precedents, and theoretical rationales, highlighting the enduring influence of the Decalogue in the formation and interpretation of Canadian law.

Legal Parallels to the Ten Commandments

Commandment Canadian Statutory Analogues

! Thou shalt not kill

Criminal Code, R.S.C., 1985, c. C-46, ss. 222–240: homicide, including culpable and non-culpable classifications [Canada, 1985a].

! Thou shalt not steal

Criminal Code, ss. 322–334: theft, fraud, and embezzlement; property rights protected under provincial legislation [Canada, 1985a].

! Thou shalt not bear false witness

Criminal Code, ss. 131–137: perjury and defamation provisions enforce truth-telling in judicial and public contexts [Canada, 1985a].

! Honor thy father and mother

Divorce Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. 3 (2nd Supp), ss. 16–20; provincial family law legislation mandates parental support, custody, and care responsibilities [Canada, 1985b].



! Thou shalt not commit adultery

Historically acknowledged in matrimonial law; the *Divorce Act* now recognizes broader grounds for dissolution, yet adultery remains relevant to property and custody considerations [Canada, 1985b].

Indirect commandments, such as prohibitions on idolatry or covetousness, persist as general ethical principles without codified legal equivalents but inform judicial interpretation and moral reasoning.

Specific Legal Examples

! Second Commandment (Prohibition of false images/idolatry): Counterfeiting and forgery provisions are codified in ss. 455–457 of the *Criminal Code*, mirroring the underlying moral injunction against deceit or false representations [Canada, 1985a].

! Fourth Commandment (Sabbath observance): The historical *Lord's Day Act* (R.S.C., 1906, c. 172) regulated Sunday labor; repealed to accommodate pluralistic societal norms [Canada, 1906].

! Fifth Commandment (Honour parents): Family law statutes require guardians to provide for dependents; enforcement through provincial statutes such as the *Children's Law Reform Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. C.12 [Ontario, 1990], reflects ethical mandates concerning familial duty.

4. Influence on Legal Philosophy

Secular Ethical Foundations: Canadian law maintains formal separation of church and state, but reflects moral reasoning rooted in early common law influenced by Judeo-Christian ethics [Charlton, 2005, pp. 45–46].

Moral Legislation Evolution: Laws against murder, theft, and perjury translate the Decalogue's principles into enforceable statutes, extending ethical considerations to contemporary governance areas, including corporate accountability and environmental responsibilities [Allen, 2002, p. 78; Rooker, 2010].

5. Limitations and Context

The Decalogue's influence is mediated rather than codified. Canadian statutory interpretation adheres to:

Secularism: Laws uphold public order independent of religious doctrine.

Cultural pluralism: Moral principles adapt to diverse societal values.

Human rights alignment: Ethical imperatives must be reconciled with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* [Canada, 1982] to ensure equality, non-discrimination, and individual freedoms.

6. Conclusion

The Ten Commandments have an enduring, albeit indirect, influence on Canadian law:

Criminal prohibitions against murder, theft, false testimony, and neglect of parental duties embody specific commandments. Historical statutes, such as the *Lord's Day Act*, illustrate the secular adaptation of moral norms. Contemporary enforcement mechanisms apply moral principles in a context-sensitive, inclusive manner, reflecting Canada's pluralist society. This study demonstrates the persistence of Judeo-Christian ethical influences while underscoring the secular, human-rights-oriented framework of modern Canadian law.

References

Allen, C.L. (2023). *The Impact of the Ten Commandments on the Development of Law*. Toronto: University Press.

<https://charltonallenlaw.com/the-impact-of-the-ten-commandments-on-the-development-of-law/>

Canada. (1906). *Lord's Day Act*, R.S.C., c. 172. Available at: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/L-9/index.html> (Accessed: 20 February 2026).

Canada. (1982). *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Part I of the *Constitution Act*, 1982, Schedule B. Available at: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html> (Accessed: 20 February 2026).

Canada. (1985a). *Criminal Code*, R.S.C., c. C-46. Ottawa: Department of Justice.

Canada. (1985b). *Divorce Act*, R.S.C., c. 3 (2nd Supp). Available at: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/D-3.4/> (Accessed: 24 February 2026).

Charlton, A. (2005). Judeo-Christian Ethics and the Canadian Legal Tradition. *Canadian Journal of Legal Studies* 14(2): 41–63.

Federer, W.J. (2002). *The Ten Commandments & Their Influence on American Law: A Study in History*. Sacramento, CA: Amerisearch, Inc., 287 pp. ISBN 0965355721, 9780965355728

Law Shun. (2025). *Did The Ten Commandments Shape Our Modern Legal System?*

<https://lawshun.com/article/did-our-laws-come-from-the-ten-commandments>

McDowell, S.K. (2011). *The Ten Commandments and Modern Society*. Toronto: Providence Foundation, 24 pp. ISBN 1887456104, 9781887456104

Ontario. (1990). *Children's Law Reform Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. C.12. Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90c12> (Accessed: 20 February 2026).

Ontario Domestic Violence Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990.

Rooker, M. (2010). *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 234 pp.