

# ABSTRACT

Domestic and family violence against religious women is increasingly being recognised as an interdisciplinary phenomenon, requiring consideration of religious beliefs and input from religious leaders in order to maximise both prevention and responses to its occurrence. For that reason, collaboration between religious leaders and human service workers is now seen as best practice in attending to the multilayered needs and safety concerns of women escaping from domestic and family violence. My research brings questions of justice and the criminal justice system visibly within that desired collaboration at a conceptual and practical level, by positing and exploring an approach to domestic and family violence against Christian women which enables relevant issues of law and faith to be held together in order to strengthen the potential for Christian women who have experienced domestic and family violence to engage with the criminal justice system if they wish to do so.

In exploring this kind of holistic approach, I make my original contribution to knowledge. I identify a conceptual divide between a faith response to domestic and family violence and a criminal justice response, and consider ways in which to bridge that divide in order to develop a 'faith-law' response to domestic and family violence against Christian women. I do this by utilising the theological work of Scottish theologians Thomas F. Torrance and James B. Torrance and synthesising areas of congruence between relevant theological concepts and those within the criminal justice system and socio-legal theory. In doing so, I theorise domestic and family violence against Christian women holistically, bringing together epistemology and ontology into an 'onto-relational' conceptualisation as per the theological method of the Torrances, which aligns with holistic developments in socio-legal theory. I utilise the lens of the 'sacrifice zone' to examine what happens to Christian women as a result of the violence they experience and explore correctives. My research establishes that holistic understandings of justice better incorporate and give expression to religious beliefs in responses to domestic and family violence.

My thesis takes the discussion into a neglected space, offering significant theory resources and theological resources and a depth of possibility to this discourse. It enables relevant faith norms and law to be viewed in an interrelated way. It provides a theoretical foundation for

integrated practices which build on current best practice collaborations between human service workers and church leaders by explicitly extending faith considerations to criminal justice responses, and vice-versa. This enables theological and legal understandings of justice to be brought to bear in a faith-law response to domestic and family violence against Christian women which holds deeply grounded restorative potential.

A significant feature of holistic and integrated theorisation is that it makes visible areas of congruence between the criminal justice system and relevant theological teachings. My holistic theorisation is also congruent in a broader conceptual sense, in that it stands alongside holistic approaches to legal theory and law which are increasingly seen in socio-legal theory and areas of law which involve interpersonal relationships. The Torrance's rejection of dualism in approaches to jurisprudence and in theology, and the concept of onto-relations sits comfortably alongside similar movements to integrate ontology and epistemology in legal theory. This allows for the development of a faith-law approach to domestic and family violence against Christian women that overcomes the sacred/secular and public/private divides which my research shows ground the predominant barriers to criminal justice system engagement. My thesis synthesises theological understandings of justice from the Torrances and in law from Hudson, to provide a corrective to the depersonalisation inherent in the violence by enabling personhood, dignity and freedom to be centred within a faith-law response. This synthesised experience of justice is what I am referring to as 'embodied justice'.

The outcome of this research constitutes a further aspect of my original contribution to knowledge: a conceptual and practical framework, grounded in a holistic, onto-relational understanding of domestic and family violence against Christian women, which identifies and utilises theological and legal areas of congruence in order to achieve three inter-related objectives. First, to illuminate and account for the socio-legal nature of domestic and family violence against Christian women, inclusive of its religio-cultural and legal elements. Second, to make visible the resultant impact of the violence on the minds and bodies of the women, and the need for this impact to be understood when attempting to give them agency and voice within any legal, religious or human service response processes. Third, to promote an embodied experience of justice for Christian women irrespective of which aspects of the criminal justice system they may choose to engage with. Achieving these objectives enables these women to experience a corrective to the sacrifice zone and its relevant theological,

onto-relational and legal components. It also provides a point of connection for church leaders to address theological questions relevant to their own interactions with women in their congregations as they seek to support them after disclosures of domestic and family violence. In turn, this enables an experience of justice which is congruent with the norms of the women's faith and the criminal justice system.