Asian readings represent a splendid diversity of voices in the contemporary chorus—some would say cacophony—of contextual interpretations of the Bible. However, even as rich a variety as that represented by the articles in this collection barely scratches the surface of the ethnic, cultural, social, economic, and religious diversity of that continent; of the other sacred scriptures with which the Bible shares the religious landscape; and of the possible methodologies for reading the literary and lived texts of human lives. As a respondent from outside the Asian context, I do not want to blur the distinct perspectives represented here by positing generalizations about Asian biblical hermeneutics. Rather, I will identify some points of intersection and challenge that these Asian voices and concerns represent for my own context of North American Protestant Christian feminism.

The articles in this collection have a number of implications for my own work. Clearly a significant difference between the Asian and North American context is the presence in the former of a number of bodies of religious literature, whereas in the latter there are few written competitors to the biblical voice. The concreteness of points of comparison and conversation allows the differences in world views they embody to stand forth more clearly than in the folk wisdom and life-texts that are the only countervoices to the Bible in my context. What is clear in the Asian situations, and what stands written in as many words, is that not all people view either ultimate or penultimate reality in the same way. We in North America, on the other hand, find ourselves having first to argue that other voices even exist!

Nevertheless, literary production in whatever context is always a more or less elite production. The voices heard in formal literature are not the voices speaking from the margins of poverty, powerlessness, and cultural "otherness." Only rarely does one hear a note of a woman’s voice from any sector of society. Even in these articles,
the only place women's reality or that of formally out-cast communities figures explicitly is when the interpreter turns from literature to life for the conversational arena.

In a multi-scriptural context one might talk about the relative power embodied in the various texts, in their cultural surroundings, and in the communities in which the texts have life. What cannot be escaped, though, is the fact that all of them speak out of and express the values of the privileged sectors of their communities of origin. One challenge I encounter is that of learning ways to "read" the non-literary texts that carry the alternative voices and world views of my own context as attentively as these Asian interpreters attend to the other scriptures of their context.

The phrase "relational hermeneutics"—and, even more, the practice of that art—has caught my attention as another significant challenge to us in the West. It is a challenge on two fronts. First, it suggests a way we might address some of the polemics that rage and the battle lines that are drawn within our own societies in intra-Christian (and intra-western) debates about implications of biblical texts for one's life and faith. Relational hermeneutics assumes the legitimacy of divergent voices and readings and seeks to understand and explore those differences. For example, women who find in the Bible support for our quest to participate fully in the institutions and activities of the society, secular and religious alike, and persons who find in the Bible grounds for still keeping us in our traditional "place" will never agree, and we will probably never really understand each other. But with a relational instead of an over-against hermeneutics, each grants the other a place to stand and the right to speak, and each respects the other's basic human dignity. The authority imputed to the Bible by a particular sector of the Christian community is not imported to resolve the dispute by brute force (often carried in the claim that the authority is inherent in the Bible itself, rather than being the confessional stance of certain readers). What is clear in the respectful attempts to understand and represent fairly the diverse voices of the multiplicity of scriptures dealt with in these articles, is the uncomfortable reminder that the respect must go both ways if the relation is to be sustained, regardless of how "right" partisans of either side know themselves to be.

The second front on which the practice of relational hermeneutics presents a challenge to my own work is as a means to participate more gracefully in the multi-cultural, multi-religious, and