Book Review: Outside the Lines

*Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith* by Mihee Kim-Kort

I grew up in a both/and kind of church. A place where multiple viewpoints were encouraged, different interpretations of Scripture explored, and a variety of understandings reached. I grew up with an understanding of Genesis 1, that God had created us in *his* image, male and female *he* created *them*. The gendering is important in this context because from my youth I understood God to be both and more, for God to be *he,* and *them,* and *she,* and beyond our understanding. Humanity was also both/and: male, and female, and *them*. My home church was involved in the beginning of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ members. It was in this church that I came to faith, was baptized, and felt a call to ministry that was encouraged and supported.

But then I went to church camp, which began enforcing a binary way of thinking in terms of right and wrong, pure and sinful, heaven and hell. Once in college, I became involved in multiple Christian organizations that enforced not only binaries but skewed heavily toward male as the positive image and female as negative. It was from my peers that I faced opposition to becoming a pastor because I was a woman. It was in college that I heard hateful words from Christians about gay folks.

Entering seminary, I rediscovered the God who transcends binaries, who created us all, who is beyond our understandings of gender. I’ve always had gay, lesbian, and bisexual biological family members. As the years have gone on, many of my transgender friends have become part of my family. My spouse was persistent at reminding me during our ultrasound appointments when I was pregnant, that whatever organs appeared on the screen did not mean that corresponded to our child’s gender. I sometimes rolled my eyes when he said that because I really didn’t want to get into a debate about gender while the ultrasound technician was poking around, but I appreciate that my husband kept insisting we stay open to whatever our child would (and will) be, created in the image of God.

Reading *Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your* Faith was like going home for me. It was going back to my roots in a welcoming and affirming church that was constantly looking at the world, at God, at ourselves through a queering lens. I’ve long understood myself as on the spectrum of sexuality, but only in later years have come to understand more fully who I am under the queer umbrella. It’s still hard for me to identify as queer because I pass as straight, I’m married to a man and have a child. But in accepting my identity as demisexual (within the asexual part of the spectrum) and bisexual, I also understand that our God is a God who blurs and erases lines. Our God is both/and/more. As Mihee states,

The more I look around, it is clear a kind of revolution is happening around identity. People are recognizing the tenuous boundaries around their selves… How we understand ourselves is constantly shifting, and it’s that slippage that compels me. It’s in that slippage where queerness emerges as a means to embrace the gray areas and the ambiguities (27-28).

In embracing queerness, in understanding who we are, we begin to be open to God more fully, and the work of compassion flows more freely.

This is an important book to read, as many of us struggle to find our place, to figure out who we are—whether it be our gender or sexuality, or our ethnic identity as more of us become descendants of mixed backgrounds—and I suspect, our faith identity, as many of us as Christians relate to our siblings in Judaism and Islam, and our other cousins of Buddhism and other traditions. Embracing queerness means a both/and, and more, in all aspects of our identity, and in our understanding of God.