

On Marxsen and Wesley

1. There is evidently an important parallel between Marxsen and Wesley at the point of their "ecumenical passion" (NTBK, 132) and "Catholic Spirit," respectively.
2. What Marxsen means by "the enactment," relative to which all reflection is but a means--an enciphering, whose purpose is both to hold fast to the enactment and to enable it to be enacted anew--is evidently formally, or functionally, the same as what Wesley means in speaking of faith working through love. The difference, significantly, is that, while Marxsen's emphasis is more upon the occurrence to which faith is the response, Wesley's is more upon the faith working through love that is the response to the occurrence. Presumably, however, this is not anything more than a difference of emphasis.
3. The most significant agreement, however, is that, relative to the existential reality of Christianity, all reflection, doctrine, dogma, etc. is strictly secondary and, at best, instrumental. To be sure, Marxsen no more endorses a simple doctrinal latitudinarism than Wesley does (cf. NTBK, 142, where he expressly allows for doctrinal standards). His objection, rather, is to giving doctrine (= dogma) an "exclusive," church-splitting importance (NTBK, 129), which was precisely Wesley's objection. However adequate or inadequate doctrine as such may be, provided it holds fast to the event of making God happen and enables that event to happen again and again anew, it subserves its purpose and is interchangeable with every other such doctrine.