

**THE ORGAN QUESTION: STATEMENTS,  
FOR AND AGAINST THE USE OF THE  
ORGAN IN PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THE  
PROCEEDINGS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF  
GLASGOW, 1807-8**

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## THE ORGAN QUESTION

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STATEMENTS

BY

DR RITCHIE, AND DR PORTEOUS,

FOR AND AGAINST THE USE OF THE ORGAN IN  
PUBLIC WORSHIP,

IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF GLASGOW  
1807-8.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTICE,

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## THE ORGAN QUESTION.

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### INTRODUCTORY NOTICE.

I HAVE two reasons for this republication. The one is the alarm I feel at certain recent movements on behalf of instrumental music in Presbyterian worship. The other is the anxiety I feel for the success of the movements now in progress for the improvement of our Presbyterian Psalmody. I have a deep conviction that movements in the former of these directions will prove fatal to movements in the latter. That, however, is not the consideration which chiefly weighs with me. I dread the agitation of the question in our Presbyterian Churches. I dread it because I believe that it inevitably tends to schism. And on the



merits of the question, I hold a decided opinion, which I think I could myself maintain in controversy, but which, for the present, I mean to defend by the arguments of another; and that other, a man whose ability and competency cannot easily be disputed.

I wish I had for a little the quiet ear of our friends who are occasioning, if I may not say causing, the discussion of this subject in Presbyterian Church Courts. I would like to point out to them the very serious responsibility which they unwittingly incur. I am not easily frightened by the name of schism. Nor would I frighten others. But there can be no harm in a timely warning. And the warning is timely, at any rate. For as yet no one, I believe, is irrevocably committed.

In the first place, let the peculiar constitution of Presbyterian Churches be kept in mind. Where Congregationalism prevails, either avowedly, as among the great body of English Nonconformists, or virtually, as in the English Establishment, uniformity of worship

is not necessarily a condition of union. Among our Independent brethren great diversity may be tolerated, for no one is responsible for what another does; and in the Church of England, all sorts of hymns are allowed, and the service is conducted in all sorts of styles, from the richest ritualism to the baldest and tamest routine. On the Congregational system, every pastor with his people may take his own way,—one using instrumental music, and another condemning the use of it; and yet the harmony of any association they form among themselves may remain unbroken. This may or may not be a recommendation of that system. That is not now the question. It is enough to say that it is inconsistent with Presbyterianism. Those Presbyterians who disapprove, on conscientious and scriptural grounds, of a particular mode of worship,—as, for instance, of the Organ,—cannot divest themselves of responsibility by merely excluding it from their own Congregations. They are bound to resist the introduction of it in all

the other Congregations of the Church as well as in their own.

Hence I would suggest, in the second place, the impossibility of the question, if it be once raised, being left to the decision of individual Kirk-sessions and Congregations. It is easy, of course, for those who are ready to sanction the use of instrumental music, or who reckon it a matter of indifference, to consent to its being left as an open question, on which Congregations may agree to differ from one another. But if there be any, as there undoubtedly are many in all the British Presbyterian Churches, who, rightly or wrongly, have come to entertain strong convictions against the lawfulness of the practice, it is impossible for them to acquiesce in the introduction of it, even in Congregations to which they do not themselves belong. On Presbyterian principles, it is unreasonable to ask them to do so. A controversy in the Courts of the Church becomes, in these circumstances, inevitable. And if it is an unnecessary controversy,—if it is a controversy