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## The perception in the religious space: the assessment of the impact of Western reformation ideas to religious movements of Russian-Ukrainian steppe borderlands in XVIII – the early XIX centuries

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### Abstract

The present paper demonstrates that the popular "Quaker" theory (Noviztkiy, 1882) of the origin of the Dukhobors among Russian-Ukrainian Christian population under the influence of Western Reformation ideas in the end of XVIII century is illegitimate. That was proved by comparative analysis based on historical facts and historical geography data.

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*Keywords:* Orthodoxy; Spiritual Christianity; Dukhobors; Molokans; Steppe Borderlands; Sloboda Ukraine; Reformation; Yekaterinoslav Governorate; Siluan Kolesnikov

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### 1. Introduction

The current stage of historical studies represents a variety of research directions, breadth and multivariance of interpretations of factual data and building of theoretical constructs on their basis. The concept of communicative practices should be no doubt included into the list of these constructs. However, one of the challenges of modern science is the practice of creating theoretical constructs that are not based on the given facts. Instead, theoretical hypotheses are set and only then the selection of suitable factual material is done. In the result we can come across

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situations when phenomena of the past are evaluated in terms of the modern information society; parallels and extrapolations that are not based on the existing realities of the past are made. This phenomenon is particularly widespread among the research dedicated to the problems of perception in a religious space and of assessing the impact of the European Reformation of the XVI century on the Eastern Christian countries. A bright example of such approach can be observed in the study of the Spiritual Christianity movement among the Orthodox population of Russian-Ukrainian Steppe Borderland in the second half of XVIII – early XIX centuries. Moreover, the factual errors made by researchers in the middle of the XIX century still continue to be repeated in modern scientific studies. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the provisions of the popular "Quaker" theory of the origin of the Dukhobors by comparative analysis. The research was based on the basis of historical facts and historical geography data that are available for studying by modern scientists.

## 2. Discussion: factual information

### 2.1. The first problem: justification of hypothesis

In historiography the certain judgment about Dukhobors and Molokans has formed: "Russian rationalism mixed with the mysticism of the West and formed some sort of a mixture of rationalism and mysticism of Quakers, Anabaptists, Mennonites and similar sects" (Noviztkiy, 1868, p.350-351). Apparently, the basis of the "Quaker" theory was provided by the assumption made by one of the first researchers on this subject O. Novitsky in 1832 (Noviztkiy, 1882). It was interpreted by later researchers as an absolute axiom.

However, the peremptory statement about the "Quaker" origin of Spiritual Christianity in the form of Dukhoborism is questionable at least due to the fact that the idea of mysticism and antitrinitatism were nowise new to Christianity including the Orthodox. Besides, religious pacifism among Spiritual Christians appeared only at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Innikova, 1997). Moreover, the depth of "similarity" between Quakers and Dukhobors was revealed in the most clear and ridiculous way at their, so to say, collision in person, when in 1818-1819 American Quakers V. Allen and S. Grelle visited Doukhobor settlements on Molochnaya river and were horrified by Doukhobors teachings that should have been similar to their ones (Grellerde de Mobillier, 1874).

Usually, the assumption of "Quaker influence" was made by O. Novitsky and his followers upon two conditions. Firstly, from the memoirs of the Nikolsky Doukhobors of the fact that in the house of their first leader Siluan Kolesnikov the book called "The key of understanding" was read: "Sometimes the ancient book" The key of understanding" was read *and other church (books), in the church* [my italics. - O.B.] and houses" [A]. Despite the fact that the above-quoted passage from "Zapiska" explicitly states that the book "The key of understanding" is Orthodox Church book (since it would not otherwise be read in the church), supporters of the idea of linguistic borrowing did not pay enough attention to it. Some of them even believed that S. Kolesnikov was familiar with some of the basic teachings of the Anabaptists and the German mystics, among whom Saint-Martin, Eckartshausen and J. Böhme are called (Noviztkiy, 1882; Kharlamov, 1883). Works of these philosophers were no doubt extremely popular in the late XVIII century among Russian Freemasons, who were a significant part of the educated elite of the empire. Fragments from Böhme's works in the form of manuscript translations were distributed in Moscow since the end of the XVII century. However, these works have acquired the greatest popularity among the educated circles of Russian society from the 80-s of XVIII century, after their publication by N.I. Novikov and other Masons. The earliest publication of works of Böhme's disciple K. von Eckartshausen in Russian appeared in 1795, after the death of S. Kolesnikov. In general, it seems hardly reasonable to equate the chances of gaining and understanding such literature between the thin educated elite and numerous illiterate people of Steppe Borderlands. Besides, one should not overestimate the communication facilities of the Russian society in the XVIII century. Moreover, all the fantastic speculations about the "German" influence by the book "The key of understanding" were dispelled back in 1875 by the writer N.S. Leskov, who revealed the "secret" of the origin of this book: "The key of understanding, to the priests and the secular, from ignominious monk Ionakiy Golyatovsky, the rector and the abbot of the Bratsky monastery born in 1669. Tipogr. St. Gr. Kyiv Pechersk Lavra". According to Sopikovskiy description (Part 1, №578) "a rare book". Nowadays the book "the key of understanding" can only be found in some special libraries or can also be taken from Doukhobors, who make many objections to Orthodox priests on its basis; the latter do not know where it comes from and accuse the Germans therefore making the sectarians laugh" (Leskov, 1875, p.15-16).

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