CHAPTER FIVE

FULLER’S THEOLOGICAL INDEBTEDNESS
TO RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS

I think I am by the ministry, as I was by my life as a Christian before I read Edwards on the Affections. I had never entered into the spirit of a great many important things. O for some such penetrating, edifying writer on this subject! Or rather, O that the Holy Spirit would open my eyes, and let me into the things that I have never seen!1

Andrew Fuller

5.1 Historical Background of Sandemanians

What should a secretary of a newly formed missionary organization do when one of their largest financial supporters accuses him of abandoning the Reformation dogma of sola fide? This was the touchy predicament in which Andrew Fuller found himself when he visited his trusted Scotch Baptist denomination. As Fuller was based in England, he was quite familiar with Sandemanianism, yet he did not have either the time or, indeed, cause to engage it until he faced a strand of Sandemanianism within the Scotch Baptist churches. Prior to plunging into this dispute, a historical background of Sandemanianism may be helpful.

5.1.1 Sandemanianism in Scotland

As mentioned in chapter 2, the religious climate in an ‘Age of Reason’ may be one of the main factors in explaining the presence of Hyper-Calvinists and Unitarians among the Baptists in England. Yet, in Scotland, one way the Enlightenment developed was through Sandemanianism. The eighteenth century Presbyterian intolerance in Scotland gave birth to the dissection of that church, and from that disconnection, there were those who saw the New Testament as the only rule of faith and practice. The founder of this camp was John Glas (1696–1773)

---

1 “Extracts from his Diary on February 3, 1781,” WAF, 1:25.
who was born in Auchtermuchty, and raised in Perthshire where he became proficient in Greek and Latin. He studied at the University of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, and was the fifth generation of successive ministers in his family.2

Glas and Glasites formed a new church based upon what they saw as a literal interpretation of the New Testament, insisting on weekly communion, foot washing, love feasts and holy kissing. Perhaps the most significant contribution of Glas was the concept of local congregational autonomy based on what he considered to be the authority of the scripture. For this reason he is sometimes known as the “Father of Scottish Congregationalism.”3 However, with his fierce Calvinistic background, Glas believed that human effort had no part in acquiring salvation, thus rendering the concept of faith one of total objectivity. According to Thomas South, “Glas spoke only of the subjection of the mind to the testimony of the Gospel. He made no reference to the subjection of the will.”4

Even though the origin of Sandemanianism can be traced to Glas, the name of the sect is derived from his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman (1718–1771) who was born in Perth and educated at the University of Edinburgh in preparation for the ministry. Sandeman met Glas at the university and was converted to Glas's persuasions within a few weeks.5 Through Sandeman's influential writings, most notably Letters on Theron and Aspasio, he was able to disseminate the teachings of Glas. Sandemanianism first gained popularity in Dundee and Edinburgh and unlike Glas, who avoided contentious issues, Sandeman thrived on controversial debates. In stressing what he saw as the Reformation principle of sola fide, Sandeman elaborated on Glas's concept of ‘bare faith.’ Sandeman argued that “justification comes by bare faith.”6 He proclaimed that keeping “the bare truth, and to live by it alone,”7 and to

---

7 Ibid., 338.