

To Reuben E. Nelson

23 March 1959
[Montgomery, Ala.]

Just prior to departing for India, King abandoned his plans for a Russian leg of the tour, citing health reasons and "the urgency of the racial conflict in the South."¹ In the following letter, King thanks Nelson, the general secretary of the American Baptist Convention, for the organization's contribution to his trip to India and explains that a visit to the Soviet Union might "have taken on too many political connotations."² Nelson replied on 8 April.

1. "King Postpones Planned Visit to Soviet Union," *Atlanta Daily World*, 3 February 1959. In November 1958, upon learning that the American Baptist Convention would finance his proposed trip to Russia, King wrote to an intermediary outlining his reasons for desiring such a visit (King to Darrell Randall, 13 November 1958, in *Papers* 4:533-535).

2. Reuben Emmanuel Nelson (1905-1960), born in Lake Elizabeth, Minnesota, received an A.B. (1927) from Des Moines University, a B.D. (1930) from Bethel Theological Seminary, and an S.T.M. (1933) from Andover Newton Theological Seminary. After serving as pastor of First Swedish Baptist Church in Brockton, Massachusetts, as a seminary professor and as an administrator in several Baptist bodies, Nelson became general secretary of the American Baptist Convention, the largest northern-based association of Baptist churches in the United States, in 1950.

23 Mar
1959
Dr. Reuben Nelson
The American Baptist Convention
152 Madison Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Dr. Nelson:

I am just returning to the country from a most rewarding experience in India. I had planned writing you while in India to express my appreciation to you and the Executive Board of the American Baptist Convention for the contribution of nine hundred dollars toward my trip, but my schedule was so heavy that I found it impossible. Please accept my rather belated thanks at this time. I can assure you that I will long remember this kind expression of Christian generosity.

I found India a most interesting country. The people gave us a very enthusiastic reception and showered upon us the most generous hospitality imaginable. While I would not be so rash as to pretend to know India after just a months visit, I do feel that I gained some meaningful insights that will strengthen me in my commitment to the way of nonviolence as a technique to social change.

I had a chance to talk to Dr. Hargroves before leaving concerning his views on the trip to Russia.³ Maybe he was right in feeling that this was the wrong time for me to go. At any rate, I certainly did not want to go without the assurance that the Russian Baptists were participating in my coming. Without this assurance, the visit to Russia would have taken on too many political connotations. Maybe some time in the not-too-distant future it will be possible for me to make this trip.

Again, let me express my wholehearted appreciation to the American Baptists for making it possible for me to go to India without reversing my initial plans. If there is anything that I can do to assist in the great work that you are doing, please do not hesitate [to?] call on me.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin L. King, Jr.

P.S. I have been quite interested in having my church become a part of the American Baptist Convention. Is [it?] possible for a church in the South to join the American Baptist Convention? If so, please send me the necessary information.⁴

Tlc. MLKP-MBU: Box 18.

3. King refers to Vernon Hargroves, who served as president of the American Baptist Convention (1954-1955) and was a missionary in the Soviet Union.

4. In his 8 April reply, Nelson explained that churches normally apply to an association or state convention: "However, where we do not have American Baptist churches you do not need to go through the procedure of application for membership." Almost two years after King became co-pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, the church members voted to affiliate with the American Baptist Convention (King to William H. Rhoades, 26 January 1962, and Rhoades to King, 31 January 1962).