

De-baptized?

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One of the most disquieting aspects of our secularized society is the way some of faith's most treasured traditions have become devalued, trivialized and usurped. I vividly recall a baptism in which the parents, who were marginal members of the congregation I served, requested four front rows be reserved for friends and family for the baptism of their daughter. I of course agreed.

The baptism was early in the service, and it went off without a hitch. But the moment it was over, the 40 or so friends and family stood and walked out of the sanctuary. I looked at my watch--it was 11:18. It was only the next day that I learned that the early departure was due to an 11:30 "baptismal brunch" at the country club.

So I suppose on the Sunday on which the gospel lesson focuses on the baptism of Jesus, it would only be fair to the secularists to remind *Century* readers that there is now a way for people to choose to be "de-baptized"--for a simple online payment of \$4.50 to the National Secular Society in the U.K.

It began in 2009 when, according to the *Times of London*, John Hunt requested that his 1953 baptism at the St. Jude and St. Aidan Parish in the Southward Diocese, South London be revoked because he was only five months old at the time of the baptism, and besides, he no longer believes in God. Hunt was serious. He even had a "Certificate of De-baptism," for which he paid 60 pounds to have recorded in the *London Gazette*.

The Church of England informed Hunt that his lack of attendance since age 11 meant his membership had already "effectively lapsed." The baptismal record could

be amended with an annotation at his request, the church added.

The C of E maintained, however, that the baptism couldn't simply be removed. It's a matter of historical record.