

Pew 13 seat 7

by [Michael Guillebeau](#) in the [June 1, 2004](#) issue

The girl in the pew next to me
is doing her math
between prayers. I peek
at the certainties on her page yearning
for a time I knew clearly
that the sum of e to the minus x
from nothing to the infinite was
always and everlasting one
and I could prove that everything that rises
must converge.

Now the slow hardening of my brain's
arteries has rubbed those crisp
clear certainties until they're
ragged with doubt and experience.
Was the sine the one
next to me over over the big one?
Or the opposite?
Was the answer a precise
one or pi,
that vague pipe dream that
we've chased to 51 billion places
and still don't know exactly?

I chant my beliefs and wonder
what proofs I am
seeking here. Add up the blessings
of the world and subtract
the sins and you've got
what? Add up my own
petty closed set of real

and imaginary without limit.

Can it ever exceed zero?

The mass is over and the little
girl kneels in the aisle
crosses herself,
the sign of our shared belief
in a world beyond or
the mathematician's plus sign,
the sign that says with a certainty:
something more.