

# 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.