

Adult conversion

by [Alex Mouw](#) in the [September 23, 2020](#) issue

For at least the twenty-five years I've coasted
the dry, arterial freeways of Michigan,
the same billboard has hovered over I-196.
In Christmas-red letters it reads: *Believe
on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved.*
Every Friday I drink three beers and fling
myself upon my pillow, soft as the homely
belly of the Buddha. I arrange my debts
and assets like tempered glass nesting bowls
clouded with soap scum. Whoever
leases that sign year after year
would be disappointed to haul up in his net,
wriggling and cold from the deep, this
cradle evangelical as heavy and tasteless
as a freshwater sheephead. Yet today
beneath that snow-hooded, vinyl exhortation
I am electrified, too large for my skin
and roaring like a freshly gassed combine
amid frozen fields and country stores closed
for the Sabbath: to believe in Christ
makes Christ a fairy with a string in his back,
but *on*, that word like a steel fulcrum
or a vice squeezing the dark out of me,
on will ruin me. I'll arabesque on his head,
one leg aimed stiffly southward. When I fall,
I'll curse the family Bible and wipe the snow
from my face even as I tug at his sleeve
for more, desperate as a gasping fish.