

## John Dickson (Studio)

Hey, John Dickson here. What you're about to hear is a live episode we recorded earlier this year in Sydney with the wonderful Stan Grant for those who Dunno him. Stan is a celebrated Australian journalist and writer with an amazing. 30 years of experience in the field with both Aussie and American networks.

Before we get into the episode proper, for our non Australian listeners, my first question to Stan is about the Australian Indigenous voice referendum, or just the voice as I call it in the show. Australians were asked in 2023, whether they supported a change to the Australian constitution that would make way for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice, basically a permanent advisory body to make representations to government.

Stan, himself a proud Wiradjuri man, was one of the key voices contributing to the national debate. The final referendum result, was a huge No. We'll pop some of Stan's writings on the topic in the show notes. For our plus subscribers, we've included the Q& A part of the evening in your feed, just for you guys.

I hope you enjoy it. It was amazing. All right, on with the show.

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## MEDIA - Into the Woods

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**John Dickson:** Well, you can be sure that if there is a reference to a musical on Undeceptions. Uh, producer Kaylee is behind it. And, uh, that is her all time favorite musical, Stephen Sondheim's Into the Woods, which,

uh, seven people have heard. Uh, it's interesting, it throws together fairy tale characters, uh, and gives them all their great wish.

And at the end of Act 1, which is the scene you just saw, they have their wishes fulfilled. So, Cinderella finds her prince. Rapunzel is rescued from the tower. And she gets a prince as well. Jack and his mother, um, get the gold at the top of the beanstalk. And little Red Riding Hood has learnt all the lessons of life.

And she's saved from the wolf. That is Act 1. Act 2, as some of you know, gets very dark, very quickly. What do you do when you get what you've been searching for? And it isn't. Here's how the New York Times review of the musical put it: These fairy tale characters wrestle with the question of whether getting what you want is actually good for you? What if the wish come true isn't really worth what it cost? Act 1, Enchantments. Act two, disenchantment. And my guest tonight has been probing this very theme on a cultural scale. He writes, The modern project for three centuries has been a project of disenchantment. Since the Enlightenment, we have celebrated the supposed triumph of reason until reason itself erased all our horrors.

We all went into the woods to get our wish of a secular, liberal democracy, but we found ourselves anxious, distrustful, and isolated. The question is, is there a way, a way to solace? To community. To hope. Is there a way to re enchantment? I am John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

Each episode of interceptions we explore. There's some aspect of life, faith, history, science, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten, and with the help of people who know what they're talking about, we're trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out. The Fabulous Undeceptionist.

Ah, it is a delight to be back in Australia to be on home turf tonight here in Sydney. And I am so pleased to introduce you to my guest. My guest tonight is a Wiradjuri man. He's a veteran writer and journalist. And who would have

predicted has become a writer. a public theologian. Indeed, now the distinguished professor of theology.

As a journalist, he worked for the ABC, SBS, The Seven Network, and also Sky News Australia. For 11 years, he worked for CNN as an anchor, as a senior correspondent in both Asia and the Middle East. His best selling book, Talking to My Country, won the Walkley Book Award, and then he won another Walkley for his journalism covering Indigenous affairs.

Now, he's a columnist with a fortnightly column for the Saturday Paper. Thank you. And he also recently completed his doctorate in theology at Charles Sturt University. Please help me welcome a great Australian, Stan Grant.

**Stan Grant:** Thank you very much. Very nice of you. Nice to see you all here. How fun.

**John Dickson:** Um, I get to ask most of the questions tonight, but we are gonna have a time for public q and day. Great. Yeah. Which, uh, to prepare for maybe text, uh, the screen if, uh, if the number is on the screen. Producer Kaylee will be collating questions.

She'll ask the most difficult questions, uh, for, for Stan. And, uh, we'll, we'll have a, a, a moment later in the night. But Stan, um, I just wanna begin, um, by asking a question. I'm sure. Um, many in the audience are desperate to know the answer to, and maybe they're feeling desperate for different reasons. Um, how are you feeling processing the, um, referendum on the voice to parliament from last year?

**Stan Grant:** Processing is a good word, John, because it has been a process. It was a bruising experience for First Nations people. It was a tough experience for the country immediately after the no vote. And I remember watching it on the night and seeing how quickly that vote came in, um, and how resounding the no vote was and feeling something shift in me and something shift in the country.

And there was an initial period of silence. Uh, many First Nations prominent First Nations people who'd been involved in the campaign I just went into a period of reflection, and there were no words left, really, to use. And I, I've sort of continued that in a lot of ways. Just to, silence is not non speech, it is actually the quiet that allows you to hear other people.

And I think for me, I needed to hear another side of Australia. I needed to hear a word that wasn't just no. And I needed to ask myself hard questions about how we had failed to connect. How easily the entire debate around the referendum had been captured by various sectional interests across the political platform.

And we stopped talking to each other. We, ordinary people that we pass in the street, ordinary Australians, we stop speaking to each other. And I suppose the biggest takeaway for me, John, and the thing that I've, has brought me the most, um, solace and inspiration is to say that if politics has failed us as First Nations people, what sustains us?

And ultimately that has been God, my country, my kinship, and the generosity that comes from that. And in saying to myself that regardless of the vote, and regardless of whether people voted yes or no, you are my people. And we share this place. And we breathe the same air. We drink from the same rivers. And we all live under the same stars.

And we must find a way to hear each other. to create the silence necessary to find the words to speak to each other again. That's what I've been trying to do.

**John Dickson:** And you were telling me an hour ago that, um, you've found sort of a personal solace and inspiration in a, in a book that you've just written. So it's like, it was almost your therapy, even though the book isn't about the voice.

It's not a reflection on the voice

**Stan Grant:** It's not, it's not a direct reflection on the voice, but it is a response to it. Um, I found last year incredibly disenchanting, and as someone, an Aboriginal person who is very much at the, at the, in the crosshairs of this, and as someone who has a prominent position, a prominent position in the media, and who has felt, in my case, compelled to And a deep sense of responsibility to try to open up dialogue, to try to create conversation between people.

Um, it can take an enormous toll. And I experienced that, my family experienced that. Not just abuse, but threats against us as well. And I decided to step away from the media because I think the media was part of the problem. I think media thrives on conflict. I think it seeks out the worst in us. And it doesn't allow us the space to speak to each other.

I said at the time when I walked away from hosting Q& A that I don't believe the media has the language or the love to deal with the fragile spirits of our country. And I think we see that in other parts of the world as well. And I wanted to write a book that re enchanted my own soul, but hopefully spoke to the need in all of us for re enchantment, for beauty.

For grace, for generosity, for kindness and for a word that is so misunderstood, overused and misrepresented, love. A profound abiding love as a gift for being alive and sharing this space with each other. And the book is a journey into time and a meditation on the mystery of time. the beginnings of the universe, the place of God in our lives, in our souls, in the universe.

And it's also a very profound meditation on the passage of time and our own mortality, as I see it in my father who's coming to, inevitably, to the last stages of his life as an old Aboriginal man now. And what he's taught me over the years and the struggle that he's endured. And the book is also a reflection on watching my father's life unfold and coming to terms with what is inevitable when we inevitably say goodbye to the people that we love. So it's not a sad book. It's a hopeful, joyful, loving, and enchanted book.

**John Dickson:** And Stan was telling me there's a reflection in the book on St. Augustine's understanding of time. Underception's listeners are experts on Augustine.

**Stan Grant:** I'm a great St. Augustine fan. You know, in, in Confessions, St. Augustine imagines a conversation with someone. He says, what was God doing before he created time? The other person answers, he was creating hell for the over curious. And, uh, and, and I think, you know. We ask questions and sometimes those questions can lead us to hell. Um, but, but, you know, St. Augustine's ideas of time and this place of God in time, and the idea that God is unknowable and yet known to us, you know, and he says, if you think you know who God is, then you don't know who God is.

And, I think as Aboriginal people, we know that there is a divine creative spirit in our world. I was having a conversation with a, um, a fantastic young person recently. I was in Alice Springs and, and you know, that you're seated next to someone at a dinner and you just fall into these really, it was just a beautiful conversation.

And she was an atheist and she was raised to Catholic and stepped away from the faith. And there's a whole lot of reasons for that. And, and to have that conversation with someone. And so, and so, you know, I said to her at one point, I understand that impulse. Um, I've confronted that myself. I think all of us ask those questions.

But I said, do you really think when you're on our land, when you stand under these stars, when you think of the connection of tens of thousands of years, and our relationship to the Creator, The way that we express this in our dance, our art, our ceremony. Do you think that we were doing this to something that doesn't exist? And you know, Thomas Aquinas says that, um, what is God? God is ipsum esse, the act of existence itself.

**John Dickson:** Underceptions listeners are now playing bingo. Yeah. Because you just said Aquinas. Okay. Stan, I want to wind back a little bit. Um, I suspect you maybe have hinted at it already. But what was most

formative for you in your upbringing? Was it your Wiradjuri identity? Was it family? Was it just that you grew up knowing you were a handsome fellow? No. I, um, We've got photos of you above.

**Stan Grant:** Oh my goodness. No one should ever be seen that large. Um. Uh, look, it was all of that really, not the handsome bit, but it was all of the, uh, I was so fortunate, you know, to be born into a family of such immense love, just immense love. Uh, people who had by many measures, nothing, you know, we were an Aboriginal family. This was the first generation off the missions. We were trying to make our way in a society that was very foreign to us and often hostile. We lived on the fringes of town. We moved constantly looking for work. Um, I didn't know where I was going to be from one week to the next.

I changed schools 14 times before I was even into high school. Um, It was a hand to mouth existence. My father worked on sawmills mostly, but any laboring work we could get, there were periods where I, I didn't go to school at all and went and picked fruit just to make money. Um, I would often go with my mother.

She would knock on the doors of the churches looking for food relief, food vouchers, and it was those food vouchers that, that meant that often there was something in our stomachs that night. Watching my mother sometimes. push food off her plate to feed us. Um, it was, it was extraordinary to grow up in a family of that resilience and strength and love.

To grow up in an Aboriginal family who knew who we were and what our stories were and our deep connection to those stories. And to grow up with a profound faith. You know, and I, I don't think you can separate any of those things. We have a word, Yindyamarra. Yindyamarra. And Yindyamarra is a Wiradjuri spiritual way of being.

It is to be quiet, it is to be respectful, it is to be kind and loving, but essentially it is this. To stand in a place and know that there is not one slither of light between God, you, and your place on the earth. And if we carry that



in us, then that's enough. And I was always raised to know that God was with us in our land, our country, and we expressed that in Christian faith, and we also expressed it in our own cultural connections.

And there was absolutely no separation between those things.

**John Dickson:** What took you, drew you to journalism?

**Stan Grant:** You know, my life was a series of, um, of accidents, really. I mean, there is no reason I should be sitting here with you. Um, there was nothing in my education that would indicate that I would go to university, let alone have a PhD or have the career that I'd had.

No one in my family had finished high school. No one in my family had gone to university. Um, my own education was so sporadic. I would turn up at school and I was often, um, you know, the new boy who would sit at the back, Aboriginal kid, um, not there long enough to make friends, let alone for the teacher to notice me or to bother with me.

And inevitably you face racism as well and the low expectations of people, of Aboriginal kids. I was 14 years old when I was - in Griffith High School. Um, Griffith was like a spiritual home for us. I was born there, we'd return back and forth from there. My family came out of the Aboriginal mission from there - and there was a group of us Aboriginal boys called up to the principal's office, we were 14 and I've never forgotten it. And my friends still, we still talk about it to this day. The principal said to us, "you will amount to nothing, nothing". A terrible thing to say to young boys. "You will amount to nothing, and it's better that you leave school now than to bother turning up here anymore."

Some of the boys did leave and sadly some of them are not with us today. I got lucky and my dad got another job in another town. We moved to Canberra and suddenly I was the only Aboriginal kid in the school again. And, uh, I stuck my head down and just managed to get through school.



I got a job when I left school working at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. It was an incredible, fortuitous, move for me. I was the mail boy. My uncle was the janitor and he got me a job delivering mail. I'd deliver mail around to the offices and in the afternoon I'd do photocopying.

And that was the extent of my ambition, John. I, didn't Imagine a world beyond that for me and Marcia Langton, who some of you may know, she's a very prominent Aboriginal scholar and and she's been a great champion for aboriginal people. She was doing a PhD at the time at the ANU and working at the institute as a research officer, again, just right place, right time for me.

She pulled me aside in the library one day and she said, "what are you going to do with your life?" No one had ever asked me that question. It was something I'd never contemplated. And she said to me, "your family have not struggled for you just to deliver mail". And she said, you know, "you can go to university. You can study. You finished high school". She came in the next day, she had university forms filled out for me to go to the University of New South Wales. And I did. I went to university and it was terrifying, John, because suddenly I was in a place that I didn't know these people. I didn't know that. The jokes they told, I didn't know ... these people took overseas holidays and their parents were doctors and lawyers and architects and engineers and I was so terrified for the first six months that I couldn't set foot in the dining hall because I didn't know how to eat with people who were so different to me. I used to wait till everyone left and I'd run down the street, grab a hamburger, race back, close the door before anyone came back again.

I was terrified. And there were a small group of Aboriginal students there and we clung together. But it opened a world for me, John, and from that, one opportunity led to another and to another and to another and, um, Gabby Hollows, who was Fred Hollows wife, the great eye surgeon - I used to go into their house for dinner - Gabby went and bought me a typewriter and taught me how to type and, you know, encouraged me to become a journalist and, um, and, and I managed to stumble into it.

It was just a series of very happy accidents. Good people who supported me and opportunities that I could never have imagined that I would have had.

**John Dickson:** You've incredible journalistic career. Can you take us to a moment in your career when you felt most keenly that good journalism mattered?

**Stan Grant:** I can.

I mean, there are many, many cases of this. But, um, I've been in journalism for about three months. And I was the cadet in the newsroom. I initially started at the *Canberra Times* and I was, um, a copy boy there, which meant you fetched the lunches, cleaned the cars and carried the copy around to various parts of the, um, the newsroom.

Then I got a job working in radio, as a radio cadet reporter. And I'd been there a couple of months again, barely doing anything. And there was a big bushfire in Canberra. Most of the other journalists were out, and we were coming up to the news, it was about 15 minutes to the news, and the news director came out and the bushfire was getting ever closer to the city, and he threw me the keys and he said, I want you to go out and cover this fire.

I had never done this in my life. And he said, I want to come to you live at the top of the hour when we go to the news. So I hopped in the car. And I thought, right, what do I do? You know, I mean, where's the fire?

I was driving around trying to, I could see the smoke, I'm driving and trying to find this fire and all the roads are blocked. All the roads are blocked. And the news director came to me and said, Okay, five minutes to go, are you set? And I'm like, well, I can't say no. So I said, I'll be right, no problem, and I learned something then, you never, ever, ever say no in journalism. If you set out on a story, never come back with an excuse. And I thought, whatever happens here, whatever happens, I will be on air at the top of this hour, and I will say something. And you know, I think a journalist has to have, more than anything else, a gut instinct.

And you've got to have the courage to follow the instinct. And I saw a road, all the roads were blocked, and I saw one road that led to the top of the hill. And I thought, go there. I took a left turn up the top of the hill, the news is about to start, I get to the top of the hill, I've got my head, my headset on, about to go live, my walkie talkie in my hand, top of the hill, I see the entire fire.

He came to me, I described everything that I saw in front of me, the fire hoses, the smoke, the feel of the heat, people outside, everything. And I realised in that moment that I can do this. I've got instinct. I will never say no. And whatever I've done in my career has followed from that moment. I always said yes.

And it's led me into 40 years. I've reported for more than 80 countries. I lived overseas for 20 years. I've covered wars from The Troubles in Northern Ireland, to Iraq, to Afghanistan, to Somalia, to Gaza, to Syria, watched the fall of apartheid in South Africa, the death of Princess Diana, was there for the handover of Hong Kong back to China, I lived in China for 10 years watching that behemoth emerge, this enormous change of a country that's changing our lives. And in every case, when I was sent out on a story, the first thing you do is say, yes, and you never have an excuse.

**John Dickson:** I don't know if our next clip is the most significant moment in your journalistic career. Uh, but president Elbegdorge of, uh, Mongolia, uh, took you out for lunch on the great steps of Mongolia and, uh, look to the screen.

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## **MEDIA - Stan in Mongolia**

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**John Dickson:** I mean, we illustrated your point! You said yes!

**Stan Grant:** That was an amazing, um, that was an amazing experience. I, I became quite good friends with President Elbegdorj. I went up there to do an interview with him, and he came bounding out of his office and threw his arms around me. He said, “my favorite reporter on CNN!”

And then he invited me to come back and stay with him. We went out to his village and we stayed in his village. And, uh, we would go riding all day and they would put, I don't know if you've ever seen this animal called a marmot? It's sort of, yeah, it's like a prairie dog. And, and they would fill them, dead of course, they'd fill them with, um, hot stones and the hot stones would cook the meat from the inside out and you'd come back at the end of the day and there'd be this beautifully cooked marmot meat.

Um, which is great the first time, second time, third time, fourth time. By the 10th time, when you've had it for breakfast, lunch, dinner. I'm getting a bit ... and of course, if you're a guest, you get the best pieces - the heart, the kidneys, the brain. But look, it was a one, and that thing that they gave us was some sort of Snuff that they have, you know, some sort of horse radish spices. Um, it gives them a kick when they get out there on the cold steppes, riding those horses. It gives you a kick. All right. It blew my brains out that thing, but it was a, it was a wonderful experience. And that cameraman I worked with Brad, he and I shared the most unbelievable adventures of my life.

We covered war, we went into places like Mongolia, we worked in China together for 10 years and sadly he's no longer with us. To see him there tonight just, uh, warms my heart. I loved him so much. And you've, the relationships you form when you're on the road with people who have your back and you have their back. They're relationships that you could never find anywhere else.

**John Dickson:** You've been away from Australia for quite some time, 15, 20 years? What did your odyssey teach you about home?

**Stan Grant:** That's a really good question, John, because

if I thought about home, I always thought about being a Wiradjuri person. Australia always felt like a country that we negotiated. It was a foreign country in a lot of ways. I felt most comfortable amongst my kinship, amongst my people, on my own country. But we stepped outside of that. We knew that this other space was for other people.

It was a country that had grown up around us, on land taken from us, where we were excluded and segregated. We lived with a hard history. And I suppose in many ways, I never felt like an Australian until I went overseas. And when I was overseas, I met other Australians in a different way. If I met an Australian, we didn't have 200 years of this history between us.

We shared other memories. We knew what it was like to eat an orange ice block on a hot day walking home from school. We knew what it was like to lie on our stomach on the hot cement at a swimming pool. We knew what it was like to play backyard cricket. We can sing all the Cold Chisel songs. You know, I realised something then that I am an Australian, and being an Australian isn't the measure of our history.

It is the air that we breathe. It gave me a chance to see my country in a different way, and I felt for the first time I was an Australian. You know, when I was a kid, all Aboriginal kids, We always barracked for the West Indies in cricket. And, and we always cheered for the All Blacks. Anyone that would beat the Aussies, we were on their side, right?

And then I remember one day being at Twickenham in London, and the Wallabies were playing Great Britain, and Johnny Ills was playing then, he was a great goal kicker, and he lined up this shot from the sideline to win the game. And I sat there and I went, and I said, . God, I hope he kicks this. And I thought, now you're an Australian.

Mm. And, and, and look, it was, it was lovely to have that experience and to feel Australian in a different way. It also meant that as an Aboriginal person, I got to ask the questions about what put us here? Why, what were the

forces of history that created us? And when I was in China or North Korea or Pakistan or India or Iraq or South Africa, I saw the same story.

I saw people who'd lost their place in the world. I saw the big stories of history written in the small lives of everyday people. I saw people struggling to live lives of dignity in the face of catastrophe. And it gave me a language to explain my own struggle in my own country.

**John Dickson:** It's lovely to hear you talk about, you know, coming to love Australia, to feel Australian.

Um, but you've also become critical of, you know, What we might call the Western Liberal Project. And if you don't mind, I want to quote you back to yourself. I may not disagree with, I may not agree with myself now. We'll ask Dakota to bring us what I find a really powerful critique and then I want to ask you about it.

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## READING

*Our age is riven with hostility and our wounds, are our weapons. We are proud of our identities and choose our sides. At the lower end of the scale it may result in unseemly social media spats. At the extreme it sets fire to our world. Toxic identity is the devil's playground and the media often the devil's accomplice. The media can perpetuate conflict. They are unforgiving and judgmental. At worst They widen division. It is unsustainable. We see everywhere what a world of hate, vengeance, and hostile identity does. Politics is not the answer. Like media, politics invests in conflict. Modernity set us free from traditional constraints. Humans now set the limits for our world, but we may instead be seeing the limits of the human. Secular ethics, science, the market, and media. Mass media cannot hold our differences, vanity or desires.*

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**Stan Grant:** That sounds like me.

**John Dickson:** Yeah. I think it sounds like you. Uh, how does that go down with your secular friends and colleagues that, uh, yeah, it's blistering critique?

**Stan Grant:** It is confronting. I think, I think there is a, you know, we know that we live in a world of rupture. I think we all sense that something is shifting in our world.

There is a Pope Francis has described. Our world is already in the grip of World War III. Whether it be the war in cyberspace, whether it be the real wars that we see all around our world. The world has not stopped fighting wars since the end of World War I, really. World War I flowed into World War II, which flowed into the proxy wars of the Cold War in Korea and Vietnam.

And then after 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and then the end of the Soviet Empire, we quickly saw the rise of Islamist terrorism and 9 11, the forever wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, and we still see the debris from those conflicts, you know, throughout our world today. Um, there is liberal democracy itself is struggling under the weight of existential contest.

We live in closer quarters Our technology has shrunk our world, and yet we know that people feel terribly alienated and alone, and particularly the young people. The levels of mental illness among young people in Australia, between the ages of 16 and 24, almost half of people, over 40%, report having some form of mental illness.

That's telling us something is broken. And I think the liberal dream, the enlightenment dream. of a world of neutrality, a world of the loss of the subjective human into an objective one world state that Immanuel Kant



described as a world of perpetual peace, to replace what were previously the bonds of faith, or culture, or language, with a secular reality.

Rights agenda that we believe could mediate our difference as Wonderful a dream as that might have been I think we are seeing the limits of it And if we wanted any proof of that We look at the United States and we see a country that in so many ways Presented itself as a beacon of democracy the light on the hill the last great hope of humanity as it had been called And we're seeing that country almost ungovernable And again, the existential weight of contest of difference that cannot be mediated in the liberal secular sphere.

And I think there is one thing that I am sure of, and that is that the human being is not the limit. And the Enlightenment Project believed that human beings could set the limit of our world. We believed that science could take us to the mind of God. And I think we know that we have lost something.

We've lost something in our souls. We've lost a sense of wonder. We've lost a sense of enchantment. And we've lost each other.

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### Media - Stan leaves the media

*I'm not walking away for a while because of racism. We get that far too often. I'm not walking away because of social media hatred. I need a break from the media. I feel like I'm part of the problem. And I need to ask myself how or if. We can do it better.*

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**John Dickson:** Yeah. That was a powerful moment. And yeah, I read in the Saturday paper in your column, uh, a few weeks ago, uh, another little mayor Culpa, that was a little bit, yeah. Like that where, where you said it sort of dawned on you that you are the problem or part of the problem.

And, and one of the things you, you said, the wording is I've become so proud in the truth pursuing justice. But not generosity.

**Stan Grant:** Yeah.

**John Dickson:** I want to know more about that.

**Stan Grant:** Well, you have to be honest with yourself, you know, and I think, you know, as, as St. Paul says, you know, truth without love is a clanging cymbal and it's not enough to just believe that you're right. It's not enough to just have the truth on your side, but you must prepare people to be able to hear the truth. And I've had to be honest with myself, you know, there are. There are harsh truths in this country and my family have had a hard history and to be able to tell the truth of that history is important for us. It's important that people know what's happened in our own country. But I think sometimes in the desire for that truth to be told. I failed to be able to build a relationship with people where they can hear the truth. And I think before we speak, we need to embrace and we need to extend the generosity and forgiveness that says, these are hard things, but I love you and you are part of this place and we share this place together.

So now can we talk? And I think if we don't sow the ground with love, if we don't water that ground with kindness and generosity, then the truth will be a clanging cymbal, and it will inspire hatred. You know, Albert Camus, the great French philosopher and writer, Nobel laureate, um, said every claim of justice is an invitation to hate.

And Justice is often not going to be enough. Rights are not going to be enough. Democracy is not going to be enough. Simone Weil, another great French philosopher said, No, those words, democracy, rights, government, justice, they're words of the middle region. But there are higher words. Words like love, God, hope, trust, they're forgiveness.

That's what you build a world on. And that's what I'm admitting there. Sometimes I rush to the truth without enough love and it doesn't take us to where we need to be.

**John Dickson:** All of this seems to be part of a spiritual journey that we as Australians have watched you on. I may have this completely wrong, but maybe 10, 15 years ago, I thought, you know, Stan is obviously bright, incredibly articulate, but I thought of you as a little bit skeptical toward Christianity, respectful of your parents, Christianity, but a little bit skeptical yourself.

And the last 10 years, you've become so vocal, almost like you've become evangelist in chief in Australia, especially your, your columns in the Saturday. Yeah. Um, Um, to the point where your Easter article in 2022 got the highest theological praise imaginable by Miroslav Volf, who is the great Yale theologian, one of the most important theologians.

Theological thinkers today, and I think we have it on the on the screen Volf read your Easter article and said beauty and pain power and difficulty of Easter Stan Grant of ABC makes one of the best uses of Exclusion and embrace his famous theological work that I've ever seen! I guess my question is, what changed for you in recent years? Yeah. To become so vocal about Christianity? You know,

**Stan Grant:** it was, it was always there for me. I've never been a person who does not have a profound belief in God, not even a belief in God. I know God's real. And I knew when I was a boy.

And I always felt the presence of God. I would not be here without, without the presence of God in my life. But the world - you let a lot of the world in. And when you let a lot of the world in, it can push God out. You know, and I went through periods of my life, as we all do. We think we're a little bit smarter than God.

Um, we think we read enough books and we read enough philosophy. We can outsmart God. God doesn't exist. God's not real. You know, science has all the answers. I studied physics. I studied philosophy, but I, wherever I went in the world, The stories that I was drawn to, they all came back to this simple question: 'What do you do when all certainty has been removed? How do you find dignity in a world of catastrophe?' You can't pray to a proton. You look at a sunrise, it's not just a collection of gases on the horizon. How it speaks to your soul. I was in Afghanistan once and um, there was, we were at a military hospital and there was a young girl and she was badly wounded. In any other hospital she probably would have survived, but they didn't have the wherewithal to be able to treat her. And her father was sitting next to her and he was holding her hand and we were filming and we felt like terrible intruders in this moment. But that's what we were there to do. And to be able to record this and to capture something of the human struggle. And when she passed away, as she did before us, he turned to me and he smiled. I mean, he was a Muslim and he had a profound faith in God and to turn to a stranger and smile, there was something there that science can't touch. Emmanuel Kant and Hegel, and ... they don't have the answers to that. And I always felt that philosophy got me to the river's edge, but it didn't get me in the water. It didn't surrender to the world where the biggest questions are asked. And theology did. And in exploring a world of suffering and pain and finding the joy and the love of people who find a way to go on, opened me to a truth beyond what I could record on my camera or write in my stories. It was a truth that there is a divine love in all of us.

I think I felt compelled to be able to bring that to the public square. When I walked away from reporting in, you know, day to day journalism, and after a few months I was asked to, if I wanted to write a column for the Saturday paper. And I said, "only if I can write about God". And, you know, it's a big thing for a secular newspaper to say, "yeah, good, let's do that".

And, you know, look, some people criticize it, we have great letters and, but, but I believe that faith has a place in the public square. And I don't think we can understand our world if we do not understand the role of faith in our

lives and the way that shapes our lives. I wrote a piece the other week on Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox faith and how that has shaped him.

And while we may not agree, it is part of how he sees himself. And if you want to understand the war in Ukraine, you must understand that. I'm writing about Xi Jinping for next week's paper, and again, there are questions of theology that have helped to shape a worldview that has influenced him as well.

Theology is important to understanding our world, so I'm really relishing the chance to bring that to the public square. It's a big responsibility and, and it requires a vulnerability and you've gotta put your hard hat on 'cause you know people are gonna come at you, but I believe these things to be true and I don't think we can survive in our world without recognizing that there is something divine in all of us and in the creation of the universe without which we cannot understand what we're doing here.

**John Dickson:** Many will have read your reflection on the awful Bondi stabbing and on Deceptions listeners in particular, uh, may well have heard you very generously recorded it for our show.

I want to ask you to reflect on the end of that piece, which, which we'll hear now and then I'll just ask you a question about it.

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### **MEDIA: Stan's reflections on the Bondi stabbing**

*All I know is this, and I am sure of this more than I am sure of anything, God is love and I pray that is enough. Jesus rose and bore his wounds. So others might know him. His wounds were a reminder of what the world can do to us, but they were also a symbol of hope that this is not all the world will be.*

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**John Dickson:** I was so moved when I heard your recording of that and that paragraph in particular. And I want us to sort of zero in on this idea of. the death of God and the crucifixion, and why you landed there. What do the ... what does the story of Christ, the wounds of Christ, tell you in the midst of suffering?

**Stan Grant:** It tells us that you can build a world on forgiveness.

Now, I ask myself all the time when I hear someone say something. When I think that something sounds really convincing, and then I ask myself, can I build a world on that? Can we build a world on vengeance, resentment, anger, hatred? Can we build a world on justice? Can we build a world on rights? No. Can you build a world on forgiveness?

Can we build a world on forgiveness? The crucifixion event. The doubt, my God, why are you forsaking me? And the final prayer, Father forgive them, they know not what they do. Forgiving those who are putting you to death. In my culture, in Yindjamarra, we are asked to be responsible, not just for what we do, but for what you do.

To know that if there is evil in our world, it is made possible because we've created a world where it is possible. And the only answer to that world is to forgive. Not that forgiveness doesn't come without atonement or restitution, but first we must forgive. I think you can build a world on that. And when I came to write after those shocking events at Bondi Junction and how on earth do we talk about forgiveness at that moment, I can't imagine what it would be to lose your child, your parent, your loved one in such a horrible, senseless, evil crime.

And then, I asked myself, where are we if we can't create a world where love triumphs over evil? And I asked myself, where are you, God? Where are you? How can you allow these things to happen? And then I'm reminded

that evil exists in the world because we live in a fallen world where those things are possible, and that Christ was crucified because of that world, and says, if we want to say no to evil, we have to be able to love and we have to be able to forgive. And it is the hardest thing for us. We know how to build a good world, but it is still the hardest thing for us to do.

**John Dickson:** Let's hear the original narrative of the cross, thanks to Dakota.

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## READING

*It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read the King of the Jews. They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, So, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days? Come down from the cross and save yourself. In the same way, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lemasabachtani, my god, my god, why have you forsaken me? When some of those standing near heard this, they said, Listen, he's calling Elijah. Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink. Now, leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down, he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.*

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**John Dickson:** Let's press pause. I've got a five minute, Jesus, for you.

I want to read to you from the evening news of India some years ago. All 89 passengers and six crew members were killed when an Indian Airlines plane bound for Madras crashed within minutes of takeoff at Santa Cruz Airport at 1. 40am today. The plane was only some three minutes airborne when its pilot noticed a fire in one of the engines.

He was reported to have told air traffic control of the fire and said, I'm coming back. Eyewitnesses, including friends and relatives who had come to see the passengers off Saw the plane burning in the night sky like a red ball before it crashed. The passengers had no chance.

I remember that day very well. My brothers and I watching TV. The phone ringing. My mother receiving the news that she'd been dreading ever since she'd heard the midday bulletin. That my father was on that plane. And he was gone.

In the days that followed, I apparently, so my mum tells me, walked up to her and said to her, why did God let dad's plane crash?

Which is weird because we were not a religious home. I'd never been inside a church before I was 16, but somehow I knew the right question to ask. Why, God? And I share this with you, uh, not to get your sympathy, not to establish my right to talk on such a topic, simply to illustrate the universality of the question.

Even a nine year old secular kid in Sydney with no religion in his life confronted with this knows to ask, why God?

invites people to ask that question. Psalm 22 puts it well. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? So far from my cries of anguish. My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer. By night, but I find no rest.

Many, I think, feel that faced with suffering, faithful people are only allowed to echo the words of Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. But the presence of Psalm 22 immediately before reminds us that crying out, God, why, can be just as much an expression of faith. As the Lord is my shepherd.

Psalm 22 is an invitation to bring all our anguish to the almighty. It's also a promise that God himself knows our pain. Which is why it's the psalm Jesus chose to echo on the cross. At three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

This is not a cry of self doubt. It's God's own entering into our pain. God's own entering into anguish with us. This God can comfort the oppressed, not just because he is all knowing, but because he has experienced what we experience. One of the great atheists of the 20th century, Stan's already mentioned him, saw this point.

Albert Camus, often writing of the futility and silence of the universe. In his essay, *The Rebel*, said if Christianity were true, which of course it's not, it would be the answer to all our dilemmas. He wrote, Christ came to solve two major problems, evil and death. His solution consisted first in experiencing them.

The man God suffers too, with patience. Evil and death can no longer be entirely imputed to him since he suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because in its shadow the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges. and drank to the last drop. Despair included the agony of death.

For Camus, this was just a wish, a longing. He didn't quite believe it. Someone who did believe it was the poet Edward Sciletto, whose own life was ruined by World War One. And he wrote an extraordinary poem, *Jesus of the Scars*. And I'll let Dakota read for us the last stanza.

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**READING:**

*The other gods were strong, but thou was weak. They wrote, thou did stumble to a throne. But to our wounds, only God's wounds can speak. And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.*

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**John Dickson:** A final question. And you as Evangelist in Chief can land it wherever you really want to. What might you say, and you probably have had to say this, to friends who just can't believe you're so into Christianity? Who might say to you, but Stan, Christianity ruined your people. Christianity damaged First Nations cultures. And has raped and pillaged Western history. And here you are, God bothering.

**Stan Grant:** I get asked that question a lot. And particularly from people who do say that. How can you be Aboriginal and Christian? I remind them that the vast majority of us are ... because God didn't come here on the first fleet.

We lived in the wonder of God's creation for tens of thousands of years. When we heard the story of Jesus, we heard the story of an ancestor. We knew the story of a man living under empire. What is the remarkable thing of Christianity? And there are wonderful faiths and people of other faiths who have, you know, Enriched my soul.

But what is the remarkable thing of Christianity is that it says to us that in our weakness, there is the strength that in that sacrifice, in that opening yourself for the other person, in the love and forgiveness, there is an answer to that evil, and that is personified in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christianity, the belief and the faith in Christ fulfills me as a Wiradjuri person. It tells me that my ancestors were not lying for 80, 000 years when we painted God on our bodies, when we danced to God, when we sang songs to God. The Christ event speaks to all of us. What happened here, the worst of what happened here, often by people with the Bible in their hands, was not God, it was the absence of God.

It was people who could not see God when God was staring them in the face, that we were people of God. It's Elie Wiesel talks about in his memoir of Auschwitz. And he talks about five men being hanged by the Nazis. And one of the young men is taking a long time to die. And he hears one of the Nazis say, where is your God now?

And Elie Wiesel said he heard a voice inside him saying, here I am. I'm hanging in front of you. Simone Weil once said Jesus died on the cross because he was only God. And human beings find it so easy to kill God because he is only God. And yet, that only God is who we turn to, as you said, in those moments when science and rationality and the secular world can't speak to that.

Being a Christian is the essence of being Aboriginal. Being a person of God is the essence of being Aboriginal. Because that opens me to the God in all of you.

**John Dickson:** Stan Grant, thank you very much. Will you help me thank him?

Underceptions is hosted by me, John Dixon, produced by Kayleigh Payne. Directed by my dear friend, Mark Hadley. Sophie Hawkshaw is on social. Siobhan McGinnis does our online library. Lindy Leveston is my assistant. Santino DiMarco looks after finances, and is on keys in the Undeception's van tonight. Alistair Belling is researcher and writer.

And house drummer. Editing is by Richard Humway, who is also on the bass tonight. Our voice actor and cellist is Dakota Love.



Guitarist and Undeception's band maestro is Colin Benvenuto. Undeceptions is the flagship podcast of the Undeceptions Network. Letting the truth out. Will you please one more time? Thank Stan.