

## Case 14

A controversy arose in late 2003 concerning sale in the Grand Canyon National Park's bookstore of a book entitled Grand Canyon: a Different View. The book, which includes photos of the canyon that reviewers characterize as breathtaking, contains writings by twenty-four creationists, that is, adherents to the view that the Grand Canyon was formed as a direct consequence of the great flood, recounted in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament. Creationists believe "that rocks of the Canyon were formed by deposits from the flood, and that the Canyon itself was cut when a large lake broke its natural dam and cut through the rock in a few days.

Tom Vail, who compiled Grand Canyon: a Different View, conducts tours of the canyon at river level, in which he presents the creationist point of view. "For years," says Vail, "as a Colorado river guide I told people how the Grand Canyon was formed over the evolutionary span of millions of years. Then I met the Lord. Now I have a different view of the Canyon, which, according to biblical time scale, can't possibly be more than a few thousand years old."

Grand Canyon: a Different View, went on sale in the Grand Canyon National Park's bookstore in August of 2003 (a committee of park employees approved of its sale in the bookstore). That same month, Wilfrid Elders, Emeritus Professor of Geology at the University of California, Riverside, noticed it there while visiting the canyon as a participant in the National Center for Science Education's annual whitewater rafting trip. Professor Elders, a noted geologist, wrote a scathing on-line review of the book, criticizing the creationist arguments advanced by the contributing writers, and concluded with the following words:

Grand Canyon: a Different View is not a geological treatise. It is Exhibit A of a new slick strategy to proselytize by biblical literalism. ... Allowing the sale of this book within the National park was unfortunate. .... I believe that the continued sale of this book within the National park will undermine the work of NPS [National Park Service] interpreters who work so hard to educate the public.

In response to Professor Elder's critique, Tom Vail protested that removal of Grand Canyon: a Different View from the National Park's bookstore would be religious discrimination aimed at creationism. All the writers who contributed to the book "have as much right to their opinion as anyone else," he said. Vail contended as well that Creationism is no less valid scientifically than the current accepted viewpoint of geological science. "What they call science is theory, just as what is in my book is theory," said Vail.

In December of 2003 the Presidents of the American Geological Institute and six of its member scientific societies sent a letter to Joseph Alston, Superintendent of the Grand

Canyon National Park, strongly reiterating Professor Elder's views. Superintendent Alston decided that Grand Canyon: a Different View should not be sold in the Park bookstore, but was overruled by officials of the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., who announced that a high level review would be undertaken, and a policy statement issued in February of 2004. As of this time, no policy statement has been issued.

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