

## **Tony Anthony and *Taming the Tiger***

Tony Anthony is a UK-based evangelist whose former organisation, Avanti Ministries, was a member of the UK Evangelical Alliance (EA). His testimony tells of how he was raised by a relative in China and trained in martial arts, becoming a three-times world champion in Kung Fu and enjoying a successful, violent career in close protection before sinking into crime, being imprisoned, and becoming a Christian through a prison visitor. He tells his story in the award-winning book *Taming the Tiger* (2004). One and a half million copies of the book are said to have been sold worldwide and it has been translated into over twenty languages.

Promoted unreservedly as a “true story”, *Taming the Tiger* has been distributed in many prisons worldwide. Tony Anthony himself has visited many prisons in the IPCA Europe region and worldwide, too, often at the invitation of local chaplains.

Questions have been asked about the truth of Tony Anthony’s testimony from the outset. Following an extensive inquiry, on July 12, 2013 the EA and Avanti issued a joint statement concluding that “large sections of *Taming the Tiger* which claim to tell the true story of Tony Anthony’s life, do not do so”. Legal considerations prevented the EA from making a more forthright declaration. On September 19, 2013, having heard an oral summary of the confidential inquiry report, the Council of the Evangelical Alliance voted unanimously to remove Avanti Ministries from membership<sup>1</sup>. *Taming the Tiger* publishers Authentic Media also issued a statement and permanently withdrew the book from sale.

John Langlois OBE, a senior evangelical figure who chaired the inquiry, summarised his personal assessment of the evidence presented as follows:

*“Tony Anthony never went to China as a child as claimed, he was never involved in Kung Fu as claimed, and he was never involved in Close Protection as claimed”*<sup>2</sup>.

To date, no evidence has been produced to refute this assessment, but Tony Anthony has continued to claim his story is true, attributing the problems with *Taming the Tiger* to editorial errors and dramatic licence. Various websites have subsequently appeared in his support, but do not address the fundamental issues raised.

These events serve as a reminder that prison chaplains need to take all appropriate precautions and check the credentials of those they introduce into prisons under their responsibility. Enthralling testimonies are no excuse for not making basic enquiries; “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence”. Chaplains and those that work with them also need to exercise extreme caution when considering whether they can endorse those parts of inmates’ personal testimonies they cannot vouch for in person.

For further information, at the time of writing the English-language Wikipedia page on Tony Anthony provides a fair summary and extensive references (including a site defending him): see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony\\_Anthony\\_%28evangelist%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Anthony_%28evangelist%29) .

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<sup>1</sup> IDEA Magazine (magazine of the UK Evangelical Alliance), Nov/Dec 2013, p5. Avanti Ministries has announced its closure, but at the time of writing has not been formally wound up.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.crosswire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/130831-john-langlois-response.pdf>