BOOK REVIEWS—*cont.*

It is only fair to say that despite these faults it is very convenient that so much important material not otherwise easily accessible is now made available in this one volume. It will be invaluable as a reference book even though as a "teaching instrument" it is blunted by the inclusion of too much mediocrity.

GORDON HAWKINS.

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"For this relief much thanks"

a critical notice of

GROUP COUNSELLING:

A preface to its use in Correctional and Welfare Agencies.

Norman Fenton, Ph. D.

Institute for the Study of Crime and Delinquency, Sacramento, California. 1961. pp. 109.

First a personal note as a control on what follows:—

Norman Fenton's latest production aroused in me a welter of confused feelings, smugness and satisfaction mingled with frustrated aggression. Having struggled for years with Fenton's earlier writing, having chipped and chiselled at his earlier material to shape it into a form which satisfied me, but appeared to attract few other people, I am tempted to regard his latest efforts as evidence that since 1957 or so we have both been doing much the same thing in much the same way. It is reassuring to believe this but disappointing to have him get in first. No doubt certain of my American colleagues will try to comfort me by saying: "Well, that's the way the cookie crumbles".

The new handbook gives an account of how group counselling has progressed since 1954 in Californian correctional institutions. It is directed primarily towards people who are developing similar programmes in such related fields as probation, parole and social welfare agencies. It is of direct relevance to counselling work in our own institutions and deserves as wide a circulation as possible among all staff concerned in any way with this work.

Just how do the sections on prison counselling work out in relation to the earlier *Introduction to the Theory of Group Counselling* (1957)? A general impression will perhaps entitle us to force the pace a bit later.

The present handbook strikes one as the product of a more assured, more restrained and more sophisticated Fenton. Though it is much more concise than the "Introduction" it retains most of the essential material from Part I —whole passages are identical— and reinforces this with sections which are either new in content or different in emphasis. The shorter presentation has brought with it a tightness and economy of exposition which was lacking in the more diffuse, untidy discussions of the earlier volume. A certain repetitiveness remains but this is not too obtrusive. With much more material to draw on from the accumulated experience of Californian prison counselling, Fenton achieves greater definiteness and clarity. He is less obscure, less equivocal, more authoritative. He is still very much the idealist, the optimist, the salesman exploring new districts but, with a successful promotion behind it, the selling has a surer touch.

BOOK REVIEWS—*cont.*

Brevity has brought with it other gains. Many of the important points made in the earlier *Introduction* (especially in the form of qualifications, limits, distinctions, cautions, provisos) tended to get lost or obscured. One's impression is that such points, by being preserved when much of the rest was cut, have got back into perspective and that the enthusiasm and the caution have somehow in the process been put into their proper proportions.

Certain positive features of the new handbook deserve special mention for they carry definite implications for our own practice.

The handling of the concept of treatment is much more sophisticated and satisfying. The notion of "a treatment continuum" will be endorsed by anyone who has tried to preserve intact the rigour of "pure treatment" and yet admit therapeutic components in varying amounts in a wide range of penal training activities. This approach enables one to preserve useful treatment distinctions without hair-splitting and few will quarrel with Fenton's location of group counselling on a fairly broad spread "from above the most superficial level to somewhere short of the point where highly technical, clinically-oriented group psychotherapy would begin".

Perhaps the most striking and significant feature of this condensed version of counselling procedures is the fact that, apart from one brief section which discusses the specific question of access to material in case files, the word "confidentiality" is not mentioned at all. This was essentially the position in Part I of the *Introduction* but Fenton now appears to tackle problems formerly approached in terms of confidentiality and privileged communication more in relation to the group atmosphere of "mutual acceptance", "mutually trustful understanding between the group leader and the client", "their liking and respect for each other", and so on. (The change of emphasis here and in several places mentioned below may be an illusion on the part of your reviewer, arising from his need to see Fenton going in the way he would like him to go.) Emphasis on such conditions as "prerequisite to the effective conduct of group counselling" is all of a piece with Fenton's view of counselling as a stage in the transformation of prisons into therapeutic communities.

The ring of authority is most evident in Fenton's handling of training and supervision, administration and organisation. His version of "a minimal pattern of desirable training" for counsellors is, to put it mildly, impressive. They should attend at least eight successive weekly sessions of a demonstration group, each followed immediately by discussion between the leader and the trainees and supplemented by the reading of an elementary text prepared for their use. They should participate in a few sessions being conducted regularly by a colleague experienced in group counselling, this too being followed by discussion. They should be supervised in their initial counselling sessions by an experienced case worker and given further regular training and support, preferably on a group basis and preferably drawing on

BOOK REVIEWS—*cont.*

such additional specialists as might be available. A number of other desirable additions are also suggested. (All of which gets three hearty cheers from this reviewer.) Fenton however is an honest man and others may derive some comfort from his admissions that all this depends on adequate resources of personnel, that the absence of these is not a very good reason for not starting at all, that supervision in California was "make-shift at first" and could be improved even now.

A great deal of wisdom and shrewdness lies behind Fenton's various references to the introduction, direction and evaluation of counselling programmes. He points out that "the absence of genuine administrative support may be an insuperable obstacle". He admits unsolved problems of how to increase participation by middle-management, especially in a period which he tactfully refers to as "custodial management in transition". He advises that the counselling programme should be introduced slowly and carefully and "given sufficient time under patient and critical auspices before making any comprehensive evaluations as to its usefulness."

After all this, criticism may appear churlish and ungrateful but a few loose ends remain.

As we have noted, the almost complete omission of reference to "confidentiality" is in marked contrast to earlier injunctions stressing how counsellors should get this across to their groups. However one is not entitled to conclude from this that Fenton's theoretical position has changed very much. At no point in the present handbook is this advice withdrawn or the earlier emphasis directly amended. Indeed readers are referred in general terms to Parts II and III of the earlier work. And so the way remains open for continuing confusion of the kind that has arisen when others have tried to translate this notion into practice.

"Confidentiality" has, at least in this country, a doctrinal half-brother in the dogma of "no official action". Fenton comes closest to tackling the various issues which arise here in a brief discussion of whether counselling material of custodial significance should be reported to authority. His examination of this problem is focussed firstly on an illustration used in the earlier *Introduction* of how the edge can be taken off such tricky situations by persuasively involving everyone, from the inmate concerned up to the administration, in a treatment-type solution. Reference is then made to the privileged counselling situation in connection with a relatively minor lapse in propriety. Fenton's handling of this section still seems to suffer from the kind of uneasiness and evasiveness which characterised much of his earlier writing on this topic. On the other hand, ambiguity can be a virtue in some places and this may well be one of them.

In the ideal therapeutic community the doctrine of "no official action" would make no sense at all. It comes under considerable strain as soon as attempts are made to involve ordinary lay counselling staff in "democratic" fashion, in the decision-making processes of the institution, in relation, for example, to inmate training, control, discharge etc. The present handbook leaves one

BOOK REVIEWS—*cont.*

with the impression that Fenton has not quite got round yet to this sort of thing. No doubt he will.

In this country, also, confidentiality, permissiveness and non-directiveness seem to have acquired the status of an unholy trinity, all complete. This was never the position adopted by Fenton, though he sometimes left himself open to such misinterpretations. The present handbook, as has already been suggested, is much less vulnerable in this respect. The limits of permissiveness, both in terms of discussion and behaviour, seem to stand out more clearly.

The emphasis on non-directive techniques seems also to be toned down in two main ways; the first, a greater recognition of the possible value of more directive methods at least for certain types of counsellor personalities; the second, an assertion of the importance of appropriate feelings in the counsellor as opposed to mere technique. Fenton cites Carl Rogers in support of the view that procedures and techniques are secondary to warm and accepting attitudes. Rogers, however, has recently gone further than this and has said "Whatever is real in me is more important than playing a role of acceptance or empathy. I feel that to listen to oneself accurately and to be 'that which one truly is' in the relationship with the client, is one of the most difficult and demanding tasks I know." Perhaps it is not fair comment to drag this in; what is sauce for the therapist is not necessarily sauce for the counsellor. Yet this kind of realism from Rogers will perhaps take counsellors further in the long run than Fenton's idealism about human nature. Far-reaching issues lurk beneath the surface of the words here. Perhaps the best that any of us can do is to muster whatever reserves of warm feeling we may possess, learn to live with or control our other feelings and settle for that as a basis for helping others.

One final comment must be made: The expansion of counselling activities in California is clearly proceeding on a vigorous, healthy basis and one would look forward to these developments being accompanied by an even further maturing of Fenton's thinking on these matters. One could only see this as providing further stimulus and support for us in our own efforts.

R. L. MORRISON.

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DELIVERANCE TO THE CAPTIVES

Karl Barth
(Translated by Marguerite Wieser)
(S.C.M. Press Ltd. 1961. pp.160. 12s. 6d.)

ANYONE with knowledge of the countless volumes languishing on the shelves of second-hand bookshops realises that published sermons are no longer the favourite reading they were in earlier generations. The great sermons and the decisive utterances of the past are classics which will continue to be read and studied but a vast quantity of mediocre and inferior material died from exposure soon after appearing in print. Today the modern publisher has to be careful before issuing any book of sermons unless he is prepared to sustain financial loss. As a consequence we