

New view of WA brothers

BROTHER Barry Coldrey readily admits some of his history of the Christian Brothers and childcare in WA, soon to be released, will shock some people. But he expects the shocked will mainly be conservative types, easily offended.

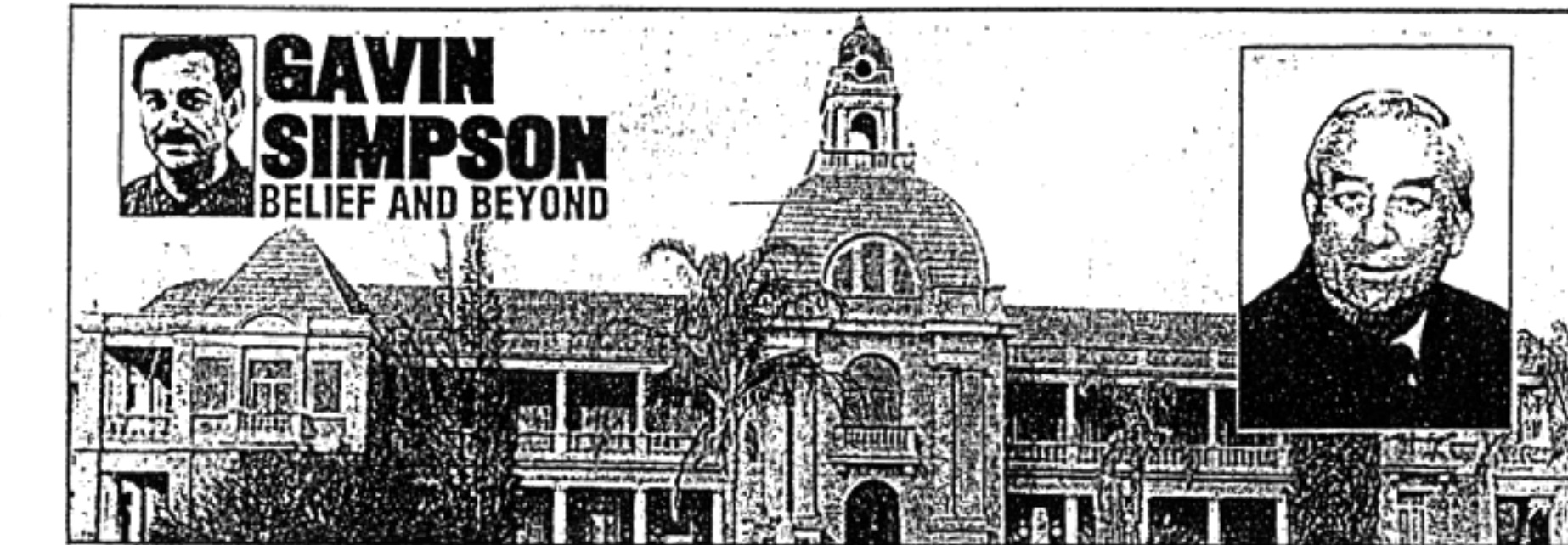
The saga of the brothers, of which he is a member, and their involvement in boys' institutions, however, does have a lot of scope for shock.

And in any frank discussion of the institutions' history and the allegations that have swirled round them, Brother Coldrey says, there is likely to be something offensive.

What those things will be exactly, he is not yet prepared to reveal. He would rather wait until his book, *The Scheme: The Christian Brothers and Childcare in Western Australia*, is released in mid November.

Brother Coldrey joined the brothers in Melbourne in 1958. He gained a PhD for researching links between the education given by Christian Brothers in Ireland and the development of the IRA, so he is no stranger to controversy.

In 1991 the brothers in WA invited



Keane College, run by the Christian Brothers in WA. INSET: Barry M. Coldrey.

him to write the history of their orphanages at Clontarf, Castledare, Bindoon and Tardun.

It was to be a celebration of the brothers' combined 210 years of service and an investigation of the allegations of abuse of orphanage inmates during the

era of child migration.

Brother Coldrey does not shrink from the idea such abuse happened. But he is keen for such unfortunate episodes not to overshadow the achievements of the brothers in Catholic education in WA.

State governments of earlier decades

"have got out of this whole business very lightly", he says. "For 40 years, the State paid a subsidy of just eight shillings per week for kids in institutions.

"With that amount of money there was a limit to what you could do. The resources just weren't there.

Governments set up a situation which guaranteed that church workers — untrained, ordinary working-class people — were always under stress."

He also points out governments of the 1920s, 30s and 40s expected children in care to learn the value of work: hard, manual work was considered appropriate.

For the brothers to get subsidies for their institutions' buildings, he says, governments even insisted the boys work on their construction.

As well as learning how to work, the theory went, the boys would learn a trade and gain on-the-job experience as well.

Brother Coldrey recognises the history of the Christian Brothers in Australia may be drawing to a close. Although, there are still several hundred brothers in the Order which was once so strong, their numbers are dwindling and their average age is increasing.

But, he says, they are still active in schools and institutions and new areas including caring for AIDS victims. And the Catholic community still values their services so highly that there is an uproar whenever they try to disengage themselves from their schools and hand over completely to lay people.