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Ireland

Family claim their brother is 'prisoner' of cult

By AILÍN QUINLAN

A CO TIPPERARY family claim an American cult is holding their brother 'prisoner' with the help of mind-control techniques.

P. J. Phelan, an agricultural consultant who works in Nenagh, his father and three sisters have vowed to "fight to the end" to "release" their brother Tony (33), who became involved with the Church of Scientology shortly after his mother's death in 1989.

"I would warn anyone thinking of be-

coming involved in Dianetics or Scientology not to get involved. Don't touch it with a barge pole. I believe it has a detrimental effect on people and I believe it is evil," he said last night.

P. J., who lives in Templemore, claims the cult — with a base in Middle Abbey Street, Dublin — exploited Tony's vulnerability after his mother's death.

According to his family, Tony has changed from a happy individual with several hobbies to an intro-

verted man who spends all his time, and much of his money, on Scientology courses.

Tony, an electronics engineer now living in Dublin, became a cult member after taking a Dianetics course in California following his mother's death.

"He just thinks the Scientology techniques work and does not seem to be thinking rationally. He will not hear anything bad about Scientology and says he wants to go on a field auditors course," said

P. J., who fears his brother is "signing his life away, bit by bit."

He said his brother became extremely angry when the family tried to show him articles warning of the potential dangers of involvement with the cult, which has been accused of brainwashing its members.

The Phelans have

written to the group's British headquarters, claiming the cult took control of Tony by exploiting his mother's death, but P. J. says they have not received a reply.

Contacted last night, Tony said he was aware the issue was an "emotional one" within his family. While he did not wish to discuss his personal finances, he did not feel he was

spending too much money on Scientology.

"It is for spiritual betterment. It is a science of the mind. I have freedom from problems, from the hostilities and sufferings of life. I feel it is good for me," he declared, adding that his family's claims about the group were exaggerated.

Scientology spokesman Gerard Ryan said

the family's fears were "understandable" as Scientology was an "unusual religion" and had "no shortage of critics".

However, he insisted, the cult did not use mind-control.

"I would repudiate every single point made by the family," he declared, adding that offers to meet Tony's family on two occasions had been refused.