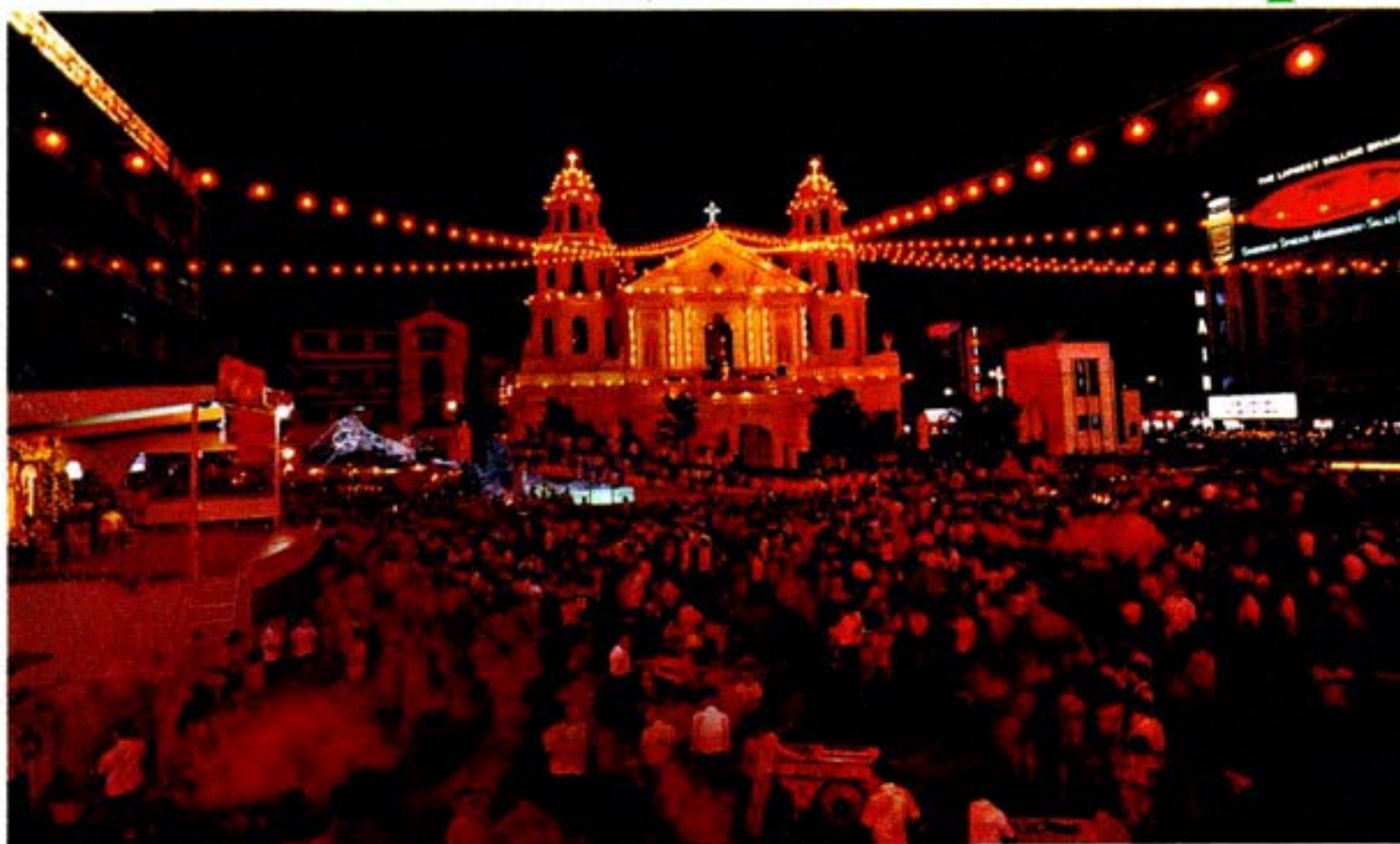


A Christmas That Won't Stop



Quiapo Church in downtown Manila aglow with lights on Christmas Eve.

In the Philippines, it's the Fourth of July, Mardi Gras and the Yule season, all rolled into one

By CELSO AL. CARUNUNGAN

PETER MARSHALL, one of America's best-loved clergymen, in a Christmas sermon that has now become a classic, said: "I thank God for Christmas. Would that it lasted all year."

Well, the Filipinos almost granted his wish. For in the Philippines, while Christmas may not last all year, it certainly is a very long season — indeed, the longest Christmas in the world. And since the Philippines is just about the only Christian nation in the Far East, it is the only place in this part of the world where the spirit of Christmas is felt at its gayest and warmest.

Just as soon as the climate cools down a bit in mid-October, and the monsoon rains drip to a halt, the Filipino Christmas season commences.

Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* is heard everywhere as early as the first weeks of October, and it

echoes on till long after Christmas day.

Interestingly enough, most Filipinos *really* dream of a White Christmas, because they have never seen one. During the Christmas season, the fields are vigorously green and the trees are all aglow with flowers.

On November first, which is All Saints' Day, the Filipinos pause for a day from their Christmas enterprises to go to the numerous cemeteries that dot the countryside. Though this day is for the dead, the celebration is anything but sad. In fact, a carnival air pervades the cemeteries, especially because of the ferris wheels, merry-go-rounds and sideshows put up near the burying grounds.

Christmas carols are often sung by youngsters beside the candlelit graves; and in the Chinese part of the cemeteries, the string orchestras play as the mourners await their dead to "partake" of the elegant food served on top of the elaborately-decorated tombs. The