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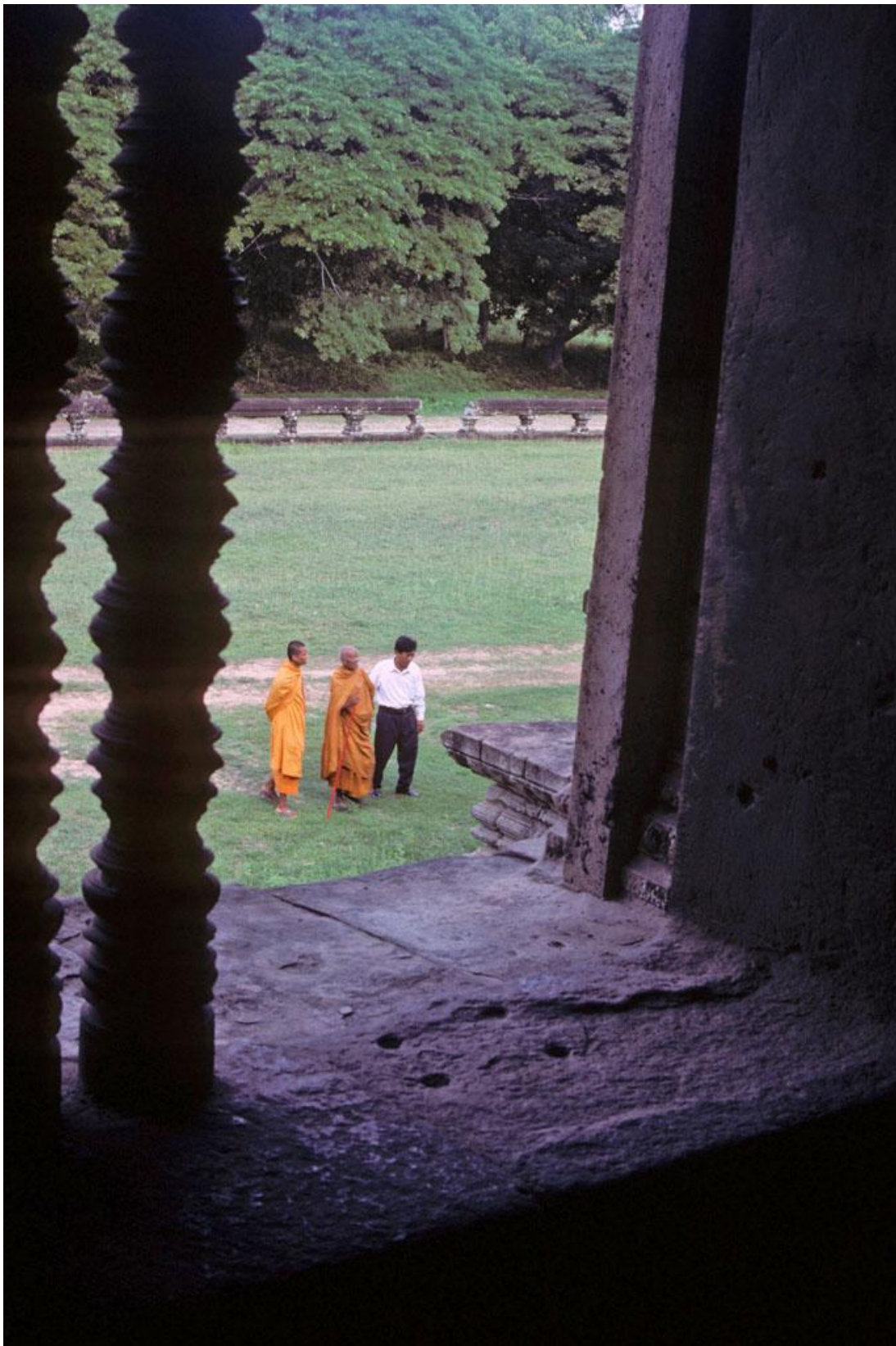
Three men including two Buddhist monks in saffron-colored robes are visible through a stone doorway at Angkor Wat. The two monks and the layman with them are standing on a grass lawn looking at the outside of the Angkor Wat building.

The color of the robes indicate that these are Theravada Buddhist monks. The current majority religion in Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka is Theravada Buddhism.

Prior to European colonial rule in the 1800s, Theravada Buddhist monks served as major councillors to ruling Southeast Asian kings. It was the king's job to protect the people and the monasteries, and to rule wisely. It was the monks' job to bless the king and help the people to make merit and move towards enlightenment. It was the commoners' job to support the king and feed the monks, who remained pure by not killing plants or animals for food.

During the Khmer Rouge Communist regime between mid-1975 and late 1978, many Buddhist monks in Cambodia were killed and local temples were desecrated or destroyed. Up to two million people, nearly a third of Cambodia's population were killed or starved under the Khmer Rouge's genocidal rule.

Since the Khmer Rouge were ousted by the Vietnamese army in 1978 and coalition governments formed, efforts have been made to restore temples, train new monks, and revive Buddhist practices among the younger generations.



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