

Sultan Qaboos and the Renaissance of Religion in Oman

Perceptions around religion in Oman tend to restrict their focus to Islam, particularly Ibadism, which is the predominant madhhab in the country. While this is deserving of attention, it does not do service to the range of religions in the country. As a seafaring nation, through its long history Oman has engaged people of other religions in its international commerce, and Hindus, Christians and Jews settled in the country to facilitate trade. In contemporary times, this continued as expatriates came to Oman to work in oil and gas, tourism, and as general workers. Because the non-Muslim population was largely transient, their presence was viewed more as a temporary state than a permanent presence in the development of the country. However, under Sultan Qaboos's reign, he embraced the enduring presence of religious diversity and took steps to incorporate the place of other religions in the country. He changed government structures to tend to the needs of non-Muslim religious communities, and he provided opportunities for exchange between religions. In doing so, Sultan Qaboos rooted this in the inherent nature of Islam as a religion that embraces the right of other religions to coexist within society. This led to a renaissance in the envisioned place of religious diversity in Oman's present and future.