

Magna Carta ‘template for global religious freedom’

ABIGAIL FRYMANN ROUCH

MAGNA CARTA provides a template for religious freedom around the world, the head of the Government’s advisory body on religious liberty said this week.

Baroness Berridge told *The Tablet* that the principle that the Church or other religious authority should be free from state interference exists in clause one of Magna Carta, which states “that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights

undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired”.

This ruled out one’s religious identity being bound to the nation state, said Berridge, chairwoman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief. Too close links between religious identity and nationality squeezed out minorities and was the backdrop to many of today’s problem situations, she said.

By way of example, Baroness Berridge said the lack of space to debate and disagree in Saudi Arabia had “spawned so much religious

terrorism ... and religious violence”. She noted that in Egypt, the Islamist-backed former President Mohamed Morsi had tried to co-opt Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the highest authority in Sunni Islam, into the heart of government – a move his successor, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, has rejected.

The peer was speaking after a panel discussion organised by the Theos think tank on Monday entitled “Magna Carta, Christianity and the Future of Liberty”, to mark the document’s 800th anniversary.

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