Butterfield: Historian Ought Not To Judge

By RICHARD BEST

Religious Emphasis Week at Rice for 1962-63 consisted of two lectures and several informal discussions by Herbert Butterfield, Professor of modern history and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University.

In his first address, Dr. Butterfield spoke on the topic "A Historian Looks at Christianity." Beginning by briefly sketching the obligations of the Christian who is a historian, the British scholar noted that before all else his duty is to deduce and connect facts in a scientific manner. THIS IS all; "to create philosophies of history is too masterly an assertion of the human intellect." God must not be brought into the argument; Butterfield quoted an earlier historian as stating that "alleged piety is no excuse for hard work."

The Christian has a unique attitude towards history, since he worships an historical Christ and stands in the Jewish tradition of the identification of God with his people. This interest in history for its own sake influenced European culture at its most formative period.

While Christians may have perverted history more often than Marxists, nevertheless the Christian historian is always committed to the belief that men are important and have deep interiors.

THE SECOND day's topic was "Christianity and Politics." Butterfield noted that in Europe Established Christianity has been alternately the bond of the tribe, the cement of society and the opiate of the people. All reforms have come from Nonconformists, the only voice of religion separate from the voice of the state. At the present time the Church must reject establishment and return to its first principles in order to wrestle with the problem of human nature manifested in all social systems.