Rabbi Views Judaism's Emphases

By RICHARD BEST

The tone and texture of a religion is both more important and more revealing than its theological concepts. This was the thesis of Rabbi Samuel Sandmel, Provost of Hebrew Union College and Professor of Bible and Hellenistic Literature at the college, as he spoke in the Rice Chapel on January 7.

RABBI SANDMEL emphasized three characteristics of Judaism. First is its non-theoretical nature. Differing from Christianity, the Jew's central question is "What should a man do?" rather than "What should a man think?"

He noted that some Jews such as Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber have been more theoretical but their writings are only individual products, not at all bringing on the Jewish faithful.

Secondly Sandmel noted the emphasis on study, pointing out that a synagogue is basically a school. The Jew is most apt to pray from a book and although his prayers are addressed to the Deity they also form a type of didactic teaching.

FINALLY the Hebrew Union Provost stressed the Jewish responsibility for charity as not being derivative, but rather as a basic assumption of Judaism. While the essence of Jewish teaching may be man's relation to God, its substance is man's relation to man.

Social obligation is such a part of the 'warp and woof' of Jewish life that it hardly has to be taught to the young. Because of this concern for humanity, Judaism has never produced an Augustine or Calvin. The Jew, while not unrealistic as to man's failings, is essentially an optimist.

In answer to a question from the floor, Rabbi Sandmel termed the effort of Brother Daniel, the Jew turned Catholic monk, to be declared a Jew by the state of Israel, a "piece of effrontery."

In answer to an inquiry on persecution, he brought out the fact that, seen in a large perspective, the Jew is hardly unique. The present problem in the United States is the establishment of true communication between religious groups which is more than mere "good will."