In the early years of the twentieth century, the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut underwent a major shift in its institutional identity. In 1909, the university appeared to reaffirm its Christian character by refusing to eliminate the requirement for attendance at Bible classes after being petitioned to do so by non-Christian students. The faculty argued that, as employees of a Christian university, they were “honor bound to present every student the truth of the Christian religion.” By 1920, however, the university decided to officially abolish obligatory Bible classes. This paper is an initial exploration of this rather abrupt shift, and focuses specifically on the university’s reaction to the new Ottoman education regulations issued in 1914 which provided the initial impetus for the elimination of the Bible class requirement. Based on archival materials from the papers of SPC President Howard Bliss and American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau (among others), this paper will examine the factors that led a majority of the administration and faculty of SPC to believe that, in the seemingly paradoxical words of Bliss, “the work of the College as a Christian Missionary Institution would have a better chance of being carried out if attendance upon week day prayers and the Bible instruction was made voluntary.” Building on the broader contextual work of Betty Anderson (yet conducting a closer reading of SPC’s wartime decisions than her work allowed for), this paper will argue that this shift was the result of the confluence of various trends, including the shifting goals of American universities, the transnational influence of underlying changes in American Protestantism, the evolution of what it meant to be a particularly “American” servant of God in the early twentieth century Middle East, and the shifting cultural context and political circumstances of the late Ottoman Empire. Christianity did continue to play a role in the university’s curriculum into the 1950s but the 1909-1920 era marks the moment when the Protestant faith was decentered from SPC’s educational program and hence its identity as a whole. [This submission is part of the panel "Being 'American' in the Middle East: Competing interpretations of 'Protestant American' culture and identity in early twentieth century Lebanon"]