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Interview of George Dumas (Cypress)

George Dumas

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

Interview of George Dumas by Don Shackelford

Shackelford: We are glad to have George Dumas visiting with us on our campus and recording for the Living History of Missions Library. George has already done this for his work in Greece and now he has moved to another area of the world and is working on the island of Cyprus. I presume he is working with people with the same background, but we look forward to talking with you George, and we would like for you to give a brief outline of your present work.

Dumas: Well, we moved to the island of Cyprus the last of September in 1971 and that will make it about one year exactly that we have been there. In 1970, I made an exploratory tour of the Island with another brother, Horace Tedley from Dallas, Texas. We were able to investigate some of the potential for preaching Christ on the Island, the possibilities that might be available. I returned in 1972 with my family during the Easter time vacation that they have over there when the schools are out for two weeks. We investigated the possibilities of speaking on the local radio station that is government controlled. That came back affirmative and so when the door was open, we felt like by the grace of God, then we moved our family there and started in 1971 in the fall.

Shackelford: Tell us a little bit about the religious background of the people of the island of Cyprus.

Dumas: Well, the people of Cyprus are nearly 100% Greek Orthodox background. The president of the Island is Archbishop Makarios and not only is he the head of the Orthodox church for that part of the world, but, also, as I mentioned, he is the president of the nation. The people are religious minded only in that they have good morals and are very nationalistic and very proud of their heritage. There is also a Turkish influence on the Island. About 18% of the population make up the Turkish people and they are Moslems although they themselves are not particularly religious minded toward their own faith. The people of Cyprus are more open-minded and freer than the people on the Turkish mainland and that is because of the tremendous English influence that has been placed upon the country as it was a colony for so many years, belonging to England. The signs in the country are written in English. English is spoken by the masses although, of course, Greek is the official language of the country. It is a very modern, progressive little nation of friendly people who do much of their business the same way as we would do it here in the States. That is quite different you know, even from Italy or Greece, or Turkey, or the lands in Palestine where we have so much red tape and things.

Shackelford: How many people are there on the Island?

Dumas: About 750,000. We are working in the capital city of Nicosia with 120,000 people.

Shackelford: What kind of a relationship do they sustain with Greece?

Dumas: Well, there is, of course, a real problem that has been brewing for the last five or six years. Many of the people want unity with the mainland Greece, but in 1963-64, when unity was attempted, Turkey lined its troops up on its southern coast and were ready to invade Cyprus to keep Greece from having it. Of course, the members of the United Nations at that time, especially America and England, prevailed upon Turkey to keep war between Turkey and Greece from breaking out. There is on the

Island the United Nations forces now, the peace keeping forces. The island is divided into several Turkish quarters, they call them, and the Greeks cannot pass through any of the Turkish villages or quarters but the Turks are free to travel freely and at will across the island where the Greeks are and many of them work in the Greek businesses. So, actually, we have a Greek society and a Turkish society on the island of Cyprus and it provides some real uniqueness, and, I believe, it provides a wonderful opportunity for someone who would like to go to Turkey but who would not like to live in that environment to begin with. They could move to the island of Cyprus, and work especially in Nicosia among the Turkish people and learn the language and get acquainted with the Turkish customs and then branch on into Turkey or even perhaps send some converts among those Turks, back into the mainland. I think that is a wonderful open door for some families to investigate.

Shackelford: What kind of relationship do these people, the Turks and the Greeks, have? Are they hostile toward one another, or generally try to get along?

Dumas: Well, they got along for many generations. As you know, the past history of Greece and Turkey has been one of war and hatred for one another. Stories have been perpetuated for years of the cruel deeds performed by the differing countries and hatred has been kept alive. But, basically, the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot get along real well. It seems to be this minority pressure, and, perhaps, even the outside pressures, sometimes for unity that cause the problems. My opinion is the Turks are more backward in some of their thinking and they are holding back the Greeks in their progressive ways many times and this causes some friction. They themselves could get along if they were left alone I think.

Shackelford: Tell us just a little bit about the methods that you have used in going to work on Cyprus and maybe some of the reasons why, from your past experience, that you have worked in the way that you have in the year that you have been there.

Dumas: Well, we've used our family in a home type relationship as the real backbone of the work. It is true that we have a radio broadcast as well as a Bible correspondence course of over 500 now, in the Greek language, going all over the Island. This gives us many contacts but we invite people into our home and use our home daily as a place to meet and to talk to people and to try and share Christ. I mentioned more of a family work in Cyprus than it was in Greece. Our two oldest children have grown up and they are able to participate more and share more in the work and they bring home friends and their friends are at that age when they are thinking about great decisions of life. They are impressed by the way our home is run and by the spirit of Christ-likeness that we try to exemplify. We are always talking about the Bible and they are very interested and a number of them have obeyed the gospel. At present, 14 people have been baptized in the year that we have been there. Most of these have been teenagers.

Shackelford: You mentioned in talking to a class earlier today that there are about 30 or so that are in attendance now.

Dumas: Yes.

Shackelford: Where do you meet for worship?

Dumas: We meet in our living room, and we've decided that this has been more of a blessing than any other type of building could have provided for us to have rented one somewhere in the town. It gives it more of a family type influence and environment. We don't stand up making our lectures or our preaching, but I sit down in a place where

the others are gathered around in a circle and we share together these spiritual truths of God's word and have the Lord's Supper on the Lord's day. We have several meetings during the week in that type of family informal atmosphere where people can ask questions, and we can try to apply and make these things apply as we come across them to our daily lives. I feel that this has been a real blessing to the people and they are enjoying coming and are anxious for our Bible studies to take place because they feel more a part of it and don't feel like it is the traditional approach and the clergy-laity type feeling that they have always had, especially among the Orthodox world where the priest is the main attraction and he's the only one who can participate in any of these things. Keeping it simple and informal, the people are able to grasp rapidly the truths of God's word and are anxious to bring others and teach others.

Shackelford: You mentioned the use of the radio and Bible correspondence course having about 500 enrolled, what is the success of your radio program now? What language is it in first of all?

Dumas: I am speaking in the English language, and we have a bad time. It's midnight on Saturday night but we must realize and know that this is a government owned broadcasting company and the president of the government happens to be also the head of the Orthodox church. So, this is really a start for that Island and getting any time is almost like a miracle. I am speaking in English and my voice is going out across most of Turkey, to all of Jordan, and most of Syria, Lebanon and Israel, and parts of Egypt and North Africa.

Shackelford: What wattage station is it?

Dumas: I'm sorry, I've forgotten the wattage of the station but it is pretty powerful in that part of the world and it seems like it is about 25,000 watts. Being out at the open sea like that, more people listen to Cyprus in Lebanon, for example, than listen to the Lebanese radio stations and that is a fact. People are listening, let's put it that way.

Shackelford: Are you receiving letters?

Dumas: Yes, I have some letters, not many. Perhaps eight letters only with request for Bible correspondence courses and Bibles in the language of those people. Arabic, for example, and Armenian and also from Israel.

Shackelford: Do you have Bible correspondence courses prepared in the various languages?

Dumas: Yes, we have them but not in all of those languages. We do in Arabic and we sent people in Israel English Bible correspondence courses as well as Armenian because, most of the Armenians and people in Israel are also English-speaking people so they are able to do that. We are hoping to get some Bible correspondence courses in Hebrew.

Shackelford: Perhaps this question is a little bit premature because you have been there such a short period of time, but yet not either, and that is what is your approach for training men to carry on when you and your family are gone?

Dumas: This must be considered always and I think the very basis upon which the work is going now is training people to be able to carry on. For example, one young man is doing most of the teaching now. We do have another missionary family on the field

now, they just arrived. It is a young Greek girl that I baptized many years ago in Greece. I performed her wedding ceremony to a young American man, and they studied at the White's Ferry Road School of Preaching in West Monroe for two years and came back and are now working with us. Joe and Frederica Monday and they have a little baby boy named Timothy. They are very helpful and will be very successful. He is involved in a Greek language course, but, of course, she already speaks Greek and there is no problem there. As far as leaving the work, we feel that the people will be able to continue because they are meeting in homes and there is no money coming in for anything except what I do receive for Bibles. We do supply Bibles in any language to these different islands and places that write in for them completely free of charge. Those things will be able to be met by the local people I'm sure.

Shackelford: Getting more now to a little bit of your philosophy of the work, I think that, obviously, for himself, I'm already aware of some of the remarks you've said in class and here, but what is your feeling about American support for national preachers?

Dumas: I don't take a real legalistic attitude toward it. I feel naturally it is best to try and not build the work upon American money and support but I think in the beginning, it is necessary that if a man helps you as an interpreter or something like that that you can support him. If you don't heed to, then, I don't think we should volunteer these things but really think them through before we make any offers. I have had several periods of thinking on this very subject through the years. I've taken one position, then taken the completely opposite position, but now I think I have gone back to the point where I think we try to take them to the extremes. I know that I would find arguments on either side where I could take those positions, but I do think that we can scripturally and successfully support foreign people with American dollars. If it is done wisely and with much prayer and consideration and good judgment on the part of the missionary and that can only come by several years on the field when he is able to make a better decision of the people. Never, under any circumstances, on any new work should we endeavor to enroll anyone in support, I think over a period of years and when someone has proven themselves that there are cases where they can be supported by American dollars and be successful with their people. It doesn't mean that they are going to be ruined and the people will not listen to them or have respect for them in all situations.

Shackelford: I think it interesting, the comment you made about after you have been there awhile. I think you and I both realize that in our own beginning and that of many of our friends in mission work that acting rashly or trying to hurry the work is where we have made some of our worse mistakes. This is just my own personal confession.

Dumas: Certainly, I think that is true. You know and I know as men on the field that brethren at home want to hear about what's going on and we, whether it is real or not, do feel the pressures of trying to send back something that will make them know that we are doing something and that this isn't a tourist vacation that we are on and that we are successful. When it gets right down to it, brethren are desirous of seeing someone baptized or seeing a building taking shape over in that part of the world. So many times we have gone with the idea that we must baptize a few regardless of just how converted they may be and many times they are not converted. But that isn't always the missionaries fault because he is not able to understand, since he is new on the field, the customs or language or traditions of the people that many times only come by him being there for a few years and learning them like that. We make these mistakes, and, of course, it takes years for us to pay for them and try to get out of that situation that we've wrongly started. So I believe that

a different approach needs to be made and we don't need to feel any pressure whatsoever from home. Elders need to place that idea into the man that they are supporting-that if we don't ever hear of any converts over there, that will not mean that we are losing confidence in you as a man on the field.

Shackelford: George, I know that your family means a great deal to you in the work, and I would like for you just to amplify on that aspect of working through your family. Your children are getting up now to the age where they can be of big help and I know the wife and how important this is to the work.

Dumas: Really, it is, and, as I mentioned, my whole thinking for New Testament Christianity has been changed somewhat in the last year. Basically, in the past, it has been Sunday and Wednesday, you know, the way we have it here in America, and preaching from the pulpit. The more I've been involved, especially in my later years in Athens as well as now in Cyprus, I see even in the New Testament more of a family type, house to house type approach to Christianity. I've found that it is really successful in my own personal experiences now in Cyprus and it also makes the whole family become the missionaries, whereas, usually, we fathers think that we are the ones to do the job when this other approach that is taken. We find that we can actually use our children to such great advantage, even in the grammar school. I went up and tried to help the grammar school boys last year right after we moved to the island. They were having basketball practice and the coach wasn't much of a basketball man, so they were only more than thrilled for me to come up and try to help them some. So I did and my sons are pretty good athletes and the team began to do well. When the school board began to meet and they have elected parents and teacher type association, well, I was asked to serve on that and all of the people raised their hands in favor of my being a part of it. I found that thus becoming a part of the community as rapidly as possible and having my children in the local schools, gives you opportunity to belong and a feeling of belonging and actually making the people realize that you should belong since you are identifying yourself with them and thus not as a foreigner. Being on the school board has given me many doors of opportunity. I was able to give out a New Testament to all of the graduating six graders who left the elementary school last year. I feel like that again is another valuable area. Shopping with your family-not that I think that husbands should do all the shopping for the wives-but going with the family shopping and talking to the people, the local butcher, the baker, the barber, and the people at the laundry, and the lady at the hair dressers, these are all potential prospects for Jesus Christ. You build up these relations in the community in which you live and take an active part in whatever you can without getting involved in their politics. People are anxious to learn about your thinking as an American or whatever place you might be from. Being able to speak the language has been such a blessing for me in Cyprus. It thrills the people to hear us communicate with them and to be able to use the expressions that are their expressions and then again to hear a foreigner, an American, to say like 'kathherzvousa,' God Be With You. Here is an American who uses God's name in a good way, you see. They think that many Americans are atheistic and all materialistic and have no time for God, and, well, facts being the facts, many times the only Americans that they know are those that have been representing Uncle Sam in the military. As you know, sometimes these are not always the best examples of Americans and have left some bad as well as some good impressions. Certainly, our military are not to be condemned as being terrible but certainly we have those who are great and those who are pretty sorry. When you use their expressions and talk about God, and I'm one who believes in talking about the Lord and letting people know that I'm interested in God, and giving people New Testaments had provided many open doors for us. The people in our community know where we stand.

Shackelford: I don't believe we have mentioned on the tape where you are working.

Dumas: Nicosia, Cyprus is the capital.

Shackelford: Nicosia is the capital?

Dumas: Yes, 120,000 people population.

Shackelford: You live in Nicosia?

Dumas: Yes, right in the city of Nicosia, and it is a beautiful city. Inland from the coastal regions and the coasts are so beautiful, but there are mountains not too far from us, about an hour and fifteen minute drive. From the latter part of December through the middle of March, there is snow and skiing and winter sports. Of course, down by the sea, not in those particular months, but from May through the end of October, there is swimming and all summer sports. We have a good seasonal period there. Not too cold and no ice around your yard ever.

Shackelford: Let's move into another area. You mentioned the language as being a help to you. Tell me, what about modern day Greek that you work in? I understand that there are two different types of modern Greek. Is this correct?

Dumas: Yes, there is the high class Greek "Katherzvousa" as it is called. Then there is the "demoteke" which means the language of the people. It isn't necessary to know the high class Greek because it is only spoken by doctors and a few people like that when they may be together. More and more they are getting away from that, and, as a matter of fact, there are movements on and some have already started to get away from the accent, the different diphthongs and problems that are created by them. There are five e's in the Greek language and to make it more applicable to all the people and to make it easier.

Shackelford: Would it be a more phonetic language that they are trying to go to; where just one symbol represents one sound or such?

Dumas: Yes, I think that is right and it's taking hold and I just don't feel that there is a real couple classes of language. In reality there are but it doesn't make that much difference. Greek people will listen to you even if you make mistakes, butchering the King's Greek from time to time. If you can communicate in Greek well enough, people can understand you and will listen and will not necessarily hold it against you. They can tell someone who is from the village by his dress. They know we are foreigners and expect us to make mistakes but are real pleased that we are making a real effort. That doesn't mean on the other hand, let me emphasize, that we should continue to make the same drastic blunders in languages always. We must always strive to improve ourselves. A man on the field who is learning will continue to improve.

Shackelford: What do you see about the future of your work or the future of the work in Cyprus in the way of your own personal plans or perhaps others that may be going there that you know of.

Dumas: First of all, we don't know how long we will be there. We could be asked to leave anytime under the circumstances that I've mentioned. I don't ever think this should be a consideration for any person who wants to work in any place in the world. The possibility is true in any nation in the world, including Italy, where you have enjoyed such freedom, that any time that government really wants you out of there,

they can give you a persona non grata and all the embassys in the world are not going to get you back in there. So we're not going to deal with what may happen. We need to get into these countries and do our best and use our best judgment and let our light shine and re-ignite. I don't know how long my future is there, but we have gone to stay and are letting God work out the details. You know I have thoughts about my children and at this particular time they are thinking of coming back to America to study. These things are heavy on our heart, at the present and after ten years in mission work, we don't feel like we need a rest or anything of that nature. We're just now where we are able to really do the greatest job that we could hope to do. The future looks bright, we are meeting young people, our children are helping, we are happy in the work, we don't have any hang-ups as the old saying is, we're just happy. My wife doesn't want to come back, she didn't lose anything in America, so to speak. She's not one who has to have some of the niceties that some feel are necessities, but rather in serving the Lord and being with her family, she's happy. That, of course, will help the missionary himself, the husband, be happy and make his work more enjoyable and be able to feel like he can leave his family and go on these missionary journeys across the island to see prospects or correspondence students who have written in asking questions about the Bible as well as people who have asked you to come and baptise them. This is not something we enjoy very often that somebody is always just writing for us to come and baptise them, but it happens and it is just good old plain work that brings about our prospects. God has played a great part in leading us to people who are receptive and we do believe in his providential work in that field and we try to take advantage of people that we do meet and talk to about Christ and not about politics and not about other things although we use those as door openers to talk to any man in the sense that Paul would say that "I become all things to all men that I may gain some." Really, we feel that we have some fine converts who will continue the work and who are sold on Christ. We are thinking about a more active effort in training some boys and girls right there on the field. I'm not sold that men should never be sent back to the states. I was at one time but now I am not. We have two American men that have come, who have made outstanding grades and who couldn't wait to get back on the field. They did not marry American girls so that speaks for itself. For every-one of those, I know you could give a hundred who didn't and I wouldn't argue the statistics, I'm just saying that I don't think missionaries should use their wisdom that comes from years of experience in helping to determine some of these factors of whether they should or whether they shouldn't.

Shackelford: Flexibility then would be a work that you think should be in the missionaries approach.

Dumas: Yes, plus the fact, Don, Greece and Cyprus are not such poverty stricken areas where a guy can't get along without America. I mean, they have a lot to offer themselves in those places. They love their countries and they love their foods and their customs as well as many of their traditions, religiously and non-religiously. They don't necessarily come to America and feel like well, I've come to heaven and I'm going to stay here, so that is something to consider too. When we make a law about not sending any preachers back to America, I think that needs to be taken into consideration. If it may be in Africa or one of the Arab nations, or Turkey for example, poverty and difficulties, certainly we need to use greater concern on that. But just to make laws as we have done and for me to take another viewpoint for us to become not enemies, but friction inbetween us, those things shouldn't come about. We can't make laws where God hasn't made any and I agree that wisdom should always be considered before making these dicisions.

Shackelford: I think this is one of the strengths in Harding's program. The fact of the visiting missionary's concept that you know as well as I that with four men here in four years, you are going to have four viewpoints, not just one, in how mission

work is to be done. If we have four more, then you will have eight because each one of us must work from our own personal basis. In concluding, George, what we have been talking about, I would like to have your estimate, if you are familiar with our program, some ways that you feel like we at Harding can improve our program in preparing young men and young women to go to the mission work.

Dumas: Speaking off the cuff, as the saying goes, without really being familiar or trying to think a little about answering a question like that, Don, all the help that we can give our young people is certainly going to be useful to them. I'm all for all the mission education that we can provide, and I think that they should have this viewpoint of flexibility and be especially geared to not make any concrete decisions of sending men back or putting people on the payroll. At least for a good period of time after they have been on the field, nothing should be done like that at the beginning. Or building consideration, I think we would all agree 100 percent on that. They need to realize that there is going to be a fantastic culture shock regardless of where they go. I mean, you have here on the campus. Boys from Arkansas who come from Little Rock here, go into culture shock away from Mother and Daddy for the first time. Magnify that on the mission field with young people who love God and who have had some of the Bible and want to share it. Certainly experience is an important consideration for sending the people overseas. Many times young people who are just filled with the love of God and want to serve, go without any real realization of what the consequences may be and, although many times they are able to make better adjustments than older people, experience is a good teacher. I feel that young people should try to work some in this country on their own, even if they go into a foreign area. I've had thought about sending our young people to work in cities like Chicago for example, just take Italians and Greeks, and if someone wanted to go and serve in Greece or Italy, I could think of no better program than for that young person to take one year before he makes the final decision, and during that year, to move to Chicago to the Italian or Greek section, and not even try to find anybody else to deal with except those Italians. To eat their balogna, to shop in their bread stores and to do their laundry with them, and the same thing if you wanted to go to Greece and to get someone to train him in the language while he is there, which will be a great asset when he gets off of the ship or airplane on the mission field. We can't underestimate that portion of it. Plus, if he were to be successful in Chicago, let's say, in converting several Italians, they may be his Timothys to go back and in the event that he found out that he could never maybe work with Italians, those Italians that he might have been able to reach, could be the ones who actually go to the nation, and then again, if he finds out that he is just not the type to work with that type of people, better the heartache come in Chicago, than on the mission field where he may be crushed by it. I think that there are opportunities in our country for men to take at least a trial run, if we may say that, and we see the wisdom of that in anything else that we do. We have scrimmage games in football, we have practice games in any sport, trial runs on the race tracks, and in anything that we do, that same thing could be applied to the mission field. Our country has communities of Chinese, Japanese, Indians, whatever you want for our using them for that great advantage.

Shackelford: That's a very good observation. George, I know that you have other things that you have to do and we appreciate you giving us the time, and I'm sure that the students that will be hearing this or reading the transcripts from it will gain from it. We appreciate everyone that has come through, and now we have two of you to listen to and we want you to know that we are concerned about your work and will be praying about it and want you to be praying about ours.

Dumas: Thank you again for having me and one final observation; young people who have plans to come, need to have as first qualification a wonderful communication with Jesus Christ and God. They must know the Savior themselves because on the field, there will be no professors or Bible Classes or places they can go to for strength or help to answer their Bible questions. If they know how to get on their knees and communicate with God and know the comfort of Christ as their Savior, they will find that that will be the greatest asset to them on the mission field.