

Dubois, Guillaume

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(1656-1723)

French cardinal, leading minister in the administration of Philippe II, duc d'Orléans (regent for King Louis XV from 1715 to 1723), and architect of the Anglo-French alliance that helped maintain peace in Europe from 1716 to 1733.

The son of a country doctor, Dubois studied for the priesthood before serving as tutor to the children of nobles who lived at the court of King Louis XIV. Among his pupils was Philippe, duc de Chartres, who succeeded to the title duc d'Orléans in 1701. When Orléans became regent for the five-year-old King Louis XV on the death of Louis XIV (Sept. 1, 1715), he made Dubois his secret adviser and envoy for foreign affairs. Capable and unscrupulous, Dubois devoted himself to promoting the dynastic interests of Orléans, whose claim to the succession to the crown of the sickly Louis XV was disputed by a rival claimant, King Philip V of Spain, a grandson of Louis XIV. In order to gain support against Philip, Dubois concluded in 1716 an alliance with France's traditional enemy, Great Britain. He pledged to back the British king George I against the Jacobites (supporters of Stuart claims to the British throne), and in return he obtained a guarantee of British support for the dynastic rights of Orléans. In 1717-18 Dubois made similar agreements with the Dutch and Austrians, thereby forming the Quadruple Alliance (Aug. 2, 1718). He was officially designated secretary of state for foreign affairs in September 1718.

When the chief minister of Spain, Giulio Alberoni, tried to further Spain's territorial ambitions by unilaterally invading Sardinia and Sicily in 1717-18, Dubois joined the British in attacking Spain (1719). In June 1720, Philip V was forced to renounce his claims to the French throne and to dismiss Alberoni. Four months later, however, a severe financial crisis in France discredited Orléans's regime and jeopardized Dubois' position. The foreign minister saved himself by pursuing a pro-Spanish policy that was popular in France because both countries were under Bourbon rule. The result was the Franco-Spanish treaty of March 1721 and the betrothal of Louis XV to the infanta Mariana, daughter of Philip V. At the same time, Dubois remained faithful to the British alliance.

In spite of his disreputable personal life, Dubois acquired the support of the French Roman Catholic Church by opposing the Jansenists, a dissident church faction. Owing to this stance, as well as to his lavish bribery at the papal curia, he was made a cardinal in July 1721. He became premier ministre (first minister) in August 1722, a year before his death.

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