

# The Final Challenge: A Meeting of the Enclave in the City of London

By [Dr. Emanuel Garcia](#)

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*The room was quiet, bright, high-ceilinged, spacious and elegantly appointed. At the long burnished table were seated two baker's dozen of the most immaculately dressed and manicured individuals — themselves virtually unknown to those outside their exclusive circle — who represented approximately sixty percent of the world's wealth. These were not celebrity billionaires and, in fact, a distinguishing mark of their highly controlled faces was a self-containment and an aversion to anything suggesting a desire to be in the public eye. No, these were weighty and, for the most part, satisfied people, male and female in equal measure, predominantly elderly, though a few hailed from middle age, who shunned ostentation.*

They nodded as Lord X entered and took his seat at the table. His was a cheerful visage, with pink fleshy jowls, and he smiled in greeting, a large contagious smile that widened the lips of his auditors. Time was very precious for such a gathering so he wasted none in formalities. He signaled for the curtains to be drawn across the large high windows, and for the lights to be extinguished. Servants entered, did his bidding, and streamed away. Behind his end of the table was a large screen on which appeared a slowly revolving picture of the Earth, as if seen from deeper Space. The clouds, the seas, the continents — all slowly spun — and as his audience fixed their eyes upon them he began.

"My dear colleagues," he said, "what you see behind me is all that we possess: a single solitary planet, our pale blue precious dot, nestled within the environs of a vast cold universe. From a distance there are no borders except natural ones — oceans, mountain chains, lakes and ridges and valleys. There are none of the dividing lines we humans have been so dedicated to creating, of nations, fiefdoms, states. It is one world ..." — and here Lord X paused to clear his throat and gauge his audience, before resuming in his pleasant very British baritone — "but it is a most fragile one. Like it or not, we are its stewards."

A low murmur of agreement coursed round the table as the image of the spinning globe was altered. Now, surrounding the planet, was a sparkling cloud of gem-like points of light.

"Thanks to the research we have supported and the advances that have been made, we have, as it were, knit together a blanket that encircles our habitat and links all of humanity together into one interconnected and integrated entity whose lifeblood is finance and communication. Our computational powers have grown exponentially and the quantum world has bent its knee to our supremacy. Never before have so few wielded so much power to do so much good! Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon and our more modern brethren of the past century had vastly limited scope and range. But we, in our capable hands and sagacious minds, can now achieve the impossible. We can make of this small lonely orb a paradise, a self-sustaining world of peace, prosperity and beauty."

"Hear, hear!" ventured several auditors. The picture changed to show large clusters of dots, ant-like, overtaking the land masses, piles of brown-black points in motion forming waves and spreading, cancer-like, across the continents and spilling, in their reproductive fervor, into the seas, befouling them.

"There is one more hurdle in our way," Lord X continued, "but it may not be quite what you think. Our hurdle is not so much one of number, but one of kind, do you know. Our last exercise was very effective in showing how easy it is to impose control — you might say it was all too easy. How they cowered in fear of the invisible, fear of themselves, fear of each other, how they gladly suffered to be kept in kennels, and to be pricked!"

Now the picture of the spinning Earth dissolved and on the screen appeared a collage of athletes, all heavily tattooed, on the pitch, and off the pitch with jewelry dangling from their ears, noses, eyebrows, lips.

"Getting the masses to accept another piercing when their heroes had been paving the way was nothing difficult. Some are slowly dying, getting sick, some more rapidly, but at a measured pace. A certain winnowing is essential and it may be accomplished in several ways.

Wars are not particularly efficient, but they serve the purpose of distraction, and they foster a certain divisiveness that assists our cause — thus they *do* have a role, however limited. And then there is the climate, of course, I nearly forgot! But what we really want to be in a position to do — what we need very much to do! — is to impose a form of control that is so complete that our subjects themselves will willingly participate in the cleansing. Already we see so many who positively beg for more vaccines, for the abolition of travel, for confinement into small patches of terrain, for implanted devices that will spare them the need to use a coin or think a thought. You see, that's the trick of it all, and it has already worked, in our preliminary stages, very successfully — though not completely."

A flicker of exasperation passed over the speaker's face.

"There's the rub. There are still a few too many of them who are making our work devilishly difficult by their disobedience. They are setting a poor example and if unchecked they might prolong our project, which would not be desirable, not at this moment, perched as we are on the threshold. But with the ability to trace and track a gnat to the ends of our earth, we will have no problem in eliminating the dissidents, singly, here and there, wherever they may be, until they too are quieted."

The images on the screen faded and once more the spinning planetary globe appeared, briefly, then dissolved into the nothingness of interstellar space. The room's lights, at the nod of Lord X, went up, and the heavy drapes were drawn away from the windows by liveried servants who quickly and silently exited. Lord X rose and smiled.

"The history of the world is a history of submission and stewardship. When the coarser methods of keeping people in bondage were eschewed, we developed the finer ones of finance. I have asked you here today simply to reassure you that we have everything in hand —everything — and that our mission is unstoppable. There is, however, one further challenge which we must face, a more personal one, as it were. A final one, to be precise. You see, to achieve our vision of a single, magnificent, beautiful and unified world, there will of necessity be suffering and loss. There is no other way. We who have breached the barrier of the atomic nucleus and of the human genome must now overcome the only lingering constraint: human sympathy. Our task is not for the squeamish."

A hand was raised at the far end of the table. Lord X lifted his eyebrows. A youngish, stylish woman, tastefully bejeweled, her rich red hair pulled back and folded neatly, as if by some miracle, into a bun, stood. "Must we be so extreme, Your Lordship?" she asked. Her voice was low-pitched, pleasing, steady.

Lord X shrugged and lifted his hands, palms upward.

"One must break eggs to make an omelet, I'm afraid."

At this there was a general chuckle, a chuckle that began at His Lordship's side and convulsed the lot with laughter in mere seconds. After they had wiped their mirthful tears they clapped, Lord X bowed, and the company milled about, stretching, checking their timepieces, sauntering to the large windows for a glance at the world they ruled.

Lord X approached the questioner and took her aside. "Whenever I feel a qualm," he cooed genially, "I remind myself of the greater good." The woman smiled coldly, and turned on her heels. Lord X pursed his lips and whispered a few words into the ear of one of the younger men who had been lingering in the vicinity. The youthful scion made sure to make a note.

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*Dr. Garcia is a Philadelphia-born psychoanalyst and psychiatrist who emigrated to New Zealand in 2006. He has authored articles ranging from explorations of psychoanalytic technique, the psychology of creativity in music (Mahler, Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Delius), and politics. He is also a poet, novelist and theatrical director. He retired from psychiatric practice in 2021 after working in the public sector in New Zealand. Visit his substack at <https://newzealanddoc.substack.com/>*

*He is a regular contributor to Global Research.*

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