

THE BEGINNING

When Chiara Lubich landed in Brazil in May 1991, the country was in the grip of a serious economic recession with an annual rate of inflation reaching 500%. In Sao Paulo, seeing the overwhelming contrast between the towering skyscrapers and the teeming slums surrounding them, Chiara felt the urgent need to overturn this dramatic inequality.

She wrote in her diary:

The “crown of thorns” is what Cardinal Arns (then Archbishop) of Sao Paulo calls the girdle of poverty and misery stretching around this city of skyscrapers. It is one of the main problems of the developing countries and one of the greatest problems of the world. Even though we feel we can do very little about it, God, our Father can find an answer if we have faith in Him as his children. Nothing is impossible to God. This must be our hope and our prayer.

The city of Sao Paulo, in 1900 was a small village. What was once a forest of trees has become a forest of skyscrapers. Wealth owned by a few can achieve such great things and at the same time continue to exploit others.

Why is potential like this not used to resolve Brazil’s enormous problems? It’s because when brotherly love is missing, selfishness and calculation take over.

We must apply ourselves until goodness re-asserts itself, as I hope – no, as I am sure, it will.

On May 29, 1991, at a meeting of 650 or so entrepreneurs, workers and youth from all over Brazil, at the little Focolare town of Araceli (since renamed Ginetta) Chiara launched an idea which had begun to take shape in her mind.

We should see businesses starting up here whose profits would be freely shared with the same aim as the early Christian communities. Above all to help those in need, creating jobs and ensuring that no-one is left in poverty.

Some of the profits could be used to develop the businesses as well as the infrastructure of the little town which has the task of helping to shape a new way of thinking, ‘new men and women’. Unless there is a new way of thinking, there will be no new society! We should involve as many people as possible as shareholders no matter how small the investment. Young people should organize activities to raise capital and become shareholders in this venture to build an industrial park here.

Here in Brazil with this great wound of division between rich and poor, a small town like this with an industrial dimension, would be a beacon of light, of hope.