

= Via della Conciliazione =

Via della Conciliazione (Road of the Conciliation) is a street in the Rione of Borgo within Rome , Italy . Roughly 500 metres (1 @, @ 600 ft) in length , it connects Saint Peter 's Square to the Castel Sant 'Angelo on the western bank of the Tiber River . The road was constructed between 1936 and 1950 , and it is the primary access route to the Square . In addition to shops , it is bordered by a number of historical and religious buildings ? including the Palazzo Torlonia , the Palazzo dei Penitenzieri and the Palazzo dei Convertendi , and the churches of Santa Maria in Traspontina and Santo Spirito in Sassia .

Despite being one of the few major thoroughfares in Rome able to cope with a high volume of traffic without congestion , it is the subject of much ire both within the Roman community and among historical scholars due to the circumstances under which it was constructed . The area around the church was rebuilt several times following the various Sacks of Rome , and again after having deteriorated due to the loss of prosperity resulting from the Papacy 's relocation to Avignon during the 14th century . Through all of these reconstructions , the area in front of the short courtyard of Saint Peter 's Basilica remained a maze of densely packed structures overhanging narrow side @-@ streets and alleyways .

= = Previous plans = =

Plans were drawn up several times over the years for the construction of a major link between the Vatican City and the centre of Rome ; the number of submissions increasing dramatically with the onset of the Italian Renaissance . The first design was submitted by Leone Battista Alberti during the reign of Pope Nicholas V , and formed one of the two perennial designs proposed for the area . Alberti envisioned an " open " plan , consisting of a single voluminous V @-@ shaped boulevard , widest at St. Peter 's Basilica itself and tapering as it approached the Tiber . The other scheme of designs submitted by architects was a " closed " plan that would consist of two roads arching outwards in an ellipse , with the Tiber and the Square at opposite ends . Proponents of a closed plan would usually suggest that the space between the two causeways be separated by a colonnade , or by a row of inhabited structures whose designs would be scrutinised and approved by architects employed by the Holy See . Variations on both themes were submitted time and time again . Proponents of an " open " plan included such architects as Giovanni Battista Nolli and Cosimo Morelli . A number of other architects , such as Carlo Fontana , and at least one Pope (Sixtus V) favoured a " closed " design , with a number of streets radiating from the central square , maintaining the " spina " , or spine , of the structures of Borgo directly between the square and the Tiber . Neither approach moved beyond sketches and blueprints . Both open and closed designs were considered by the Vatican , but were ultimately discarded for reasons of expense . A thorough examination of the costs of constructing a thoroughfare was made by the Vatican @-@ approved St. Peter 's Building Commission in 1651 . Their conclusion was that " the cardinals ' proposal to demolish all the buildings between the Borgo Nuovo and the Borgo Vecchio for a greater and longer vista to the church " would be infeasible due to inordinately high expropriation costs and vested property interests .

Further momentum was lost when Gian Lorenzo Bernini was commissioned to redesign the terrace in front of the Basilica in 1656 . After discarding several sketches , Bernini settled on a colossal open space in the shape of an ellipse . With the potential expense of clearing Borgo , Bernini decided instead to make use of the warren of poorly maintained medieval buildings to obscure any view of the Vatican structures from any significant distance . In this way , pilgrims emerged from the relative darkness of the city into the vast open space and grandeur of the Square and its surrounding buildings ? a sight calculated to inspire awe in first @-@ time visitors to the Holy See 's seat of power . Bernini had originally planned to demolish a square roughly 100 m to a side directly in front of the square , filling the space with a third colonnade (or " terzo braccio ") to match the two still standing today . This would afford a longer vantage point to allow visitors a better viewing angle of the new Basilica . The death of his patron , Pope Alexander VII , put a halt to Bernini 's work . The

third set of columns was abandoned , and Bernini 's piazza remained open @-@ ended and incomplete .

From the final major reconstruction of Borgo in the 15th century , the site which the Via della Conciliazione now covers remained occupied by residential , religious , and historical buildings for nearly 500 years . The final impetus behind the road 's construction was primarily political . Borgo , along with the rest of the Papal States outside of the Vatican itself , was taken by the Kingdom of Italy during the Italian unification in the 19th Century ? leading to Pope Pius IX 's declaration that he had become a prisoner in the Vatican and the formation of the Roman Question . For the next 59 years , the Popes refused to leave the Vatican , in order to avoid any appearance of accepting the authority wielded by the Italian government over Rome as a whole . Initially , parts of the Italian government welcomed this , expecting the influence of the Papacy to fade to the point that enough political support could be gained to abolish it altogether . However , this failed to come to pass , and eventually a compromise acceptable to both states was reached in the Lateran treaty of 1929 .

= = Mussolini and Rome = =

Prime Minister Benito Mussolini , who had signed the accord on behalf of the King , resurrected the idea of a grand thoroughfare symbolically connecting the Vatican to the heart of the Italian capital . To fulfil this vision , Mussolini turned to the prominent Fascist architects Marcello Piacentini and Attilio Spaccarelli . Drawing inspiration from a number of the designs submitted by Carlo Fontana , Piacentini came up with a plan that would preserve the best aspects of both the " open " and " closed " designs ? a grand boulevard that would nonetheless obscure the majority of the Vatican buildings per Bernini 's intentions . The vast colonnaded street would require the clearance of the whole " spina " of Borgo placed in between the Basilica and the Castle . Since the facades of the buildings lining this space did not align perfectly , in order to create the illusion of a perfectly straight causeway traffic islands would be erected along both sides , with rows of obelisks leading towards the Square , doubling as lampposts . These were also intended to reduce the effect that the funnel @-@ shaped design would have on perspective when facing the Basilica . The wings of those buildings closest to the square would be preserved to form a propylaea , blocking the greater portion of the Vatican City from approaching visitors and framing the Square and Basilica at the head of a grand open space that would allow for easy vehicular access .

= = Construction = =

Demolition of the spina of Borgo began with Mussolini 's symbolic strike of the first building with a pickaxe on 29 October 1936 and continued for twelve months . Even at the time , the demolition proved controversial , with many Borgo residents displaced en masse to settlements (" borgate ") outside of the city . Among the buildings dismantled , either totally or in part , and rebuilt in another position , were the Palazzo dei Convertendi , the house of Giacomo Bartolomeo da Brescia , the Church of the Nunziatina , the palaces Rusticucci @-@ Accoramboni and degli Alicorni (the latter had been already demolished in 1931) . Other buildings , like the palace of the Governatore di Borgo and the Churches of San Giacomo Scossacavalli and Sant 'Angelo al Corridore , were destroyed . Facing into the cleared area are five other historical buildings , the Palazzo Giraud Torlonia , the church of Santa Maria in Traspontina , the Palazzo dei Penitenzieri , Palazzo Serristori , and Palazzo Cesi (which was mutilated) .

The construction of the road was only a small feature in the reconstruction of Rome ordered by Mussolini , which ranged from the restoration of the Castel Sant 'Angelo , the clearance of the Mausoleum of Augustus , to the vastly more complicated site of the Via dell 'Impero through Rome 's ancient imperial remains . His plan was to transform Rome into a monument to Italian fascism .

In five years , Rome must appear marvellous to all the peoples of the world ; vast , orderly , powerful , as it was in the time of the first empire of Augustus .

Benito Mussolini

Construction of the road continued long after Mussolini 's death and the abolition of Italian Fascism

. The obelisks along the road were installed in time for the Jubilee of 1950 .

= = Today = =

Since its completion , the road has acted as the primary access point to St. Peter 's Square , and by extension to the Vatican City itself . At times , such as during the funeral of Pope John Paul II , it has acted as an extension to the square itself , allowing a greater number of visitors to attend functions conducted there .