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## SACRED MUSIC IN EDUCATION “TOWARDS” AND “FOR PEACE”

### MUZYKA SAKRALNA W WYCHOWANIU „DO” I „DLA POKOJU”

**Streszczenie:** Celem niniejszego opracowania jest ukazanie jak muzyka sakralna wspiera wychowanie „do” i „dla” pokoju. Teoretyczne ramy refleksji stanowią koncepcje poznawczego, społecznego i emocjonalnego uczenia się w ujęciu Knuda Illerisa (2006) i pedagogika religii w ujęciu Zbigniewa Marka (2022). Przyjęcie tych koncepcji w refleksji nad wychowaniem „do” i „dla” pokoju poprzez muzykę sakralną jest zasadne z tego powodu, że odnoszą się one do tych samych wymiarów uczenia się i rozwoju na jakie oddziałuje muzyka. Poszukiwanie związków pomiędzy pokojem, wychowaniem i muzyką sakralną jest prowadzone z perspektywy chrześcijaństwa, co wymaga odwołania się do biblijnego rozumienia terminu „pokój” w wersji hebrajskiego *shalom* i greckiego *eirēnē*.

**Słowa kluczowe:** muzyka sakralna, wychowanie, pokój, uczenie się, wymiary uczenia się

**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to show how sacred music supports education *towards* and *for* peace. The theoretical framework for reflection includes the concepts of cognitive, social, and emotional learning as proposed by Knud Illeris (2006), as well as religious pedagogy in the approach of Zbigniew Marek (2022). The adoption of these concepts in reflecting on education *towards* and *for* peace through sacred music is justified, as they refer to the same dimensions of learning and development that are influenced by music. The search for connections between peace, education, and sacred music is conducted from a Christian perspective, which requires reference to the biblical understanding of the term *peace* – specifically the Hebrew *shalom* and the Greek *eirēnē*.

**Keywords:** sacred music, education, peace, learning, dimensions of learning

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## Introduction

Since the dawn of time, music has been physically present in social and cultural spaces, influencing the emotions, psyche, education, and spirituality of individuals and entire societies. Throughout the ages, people have expressed their emotions through music, supported warfare, diversified religious rituals, and celebrated peacemaking. However, music, through its universality, its ability to express emotions, and to direct human attention to what is important, disturbing, or even appalling, strongly influences people.

Władysław Stróżewski (2002), defining music, describes it “as a time filled with beauty” (p. 269), and Jacek Bramorski (2012) emphasises that “music is not only the ability to properly combine sounds in terms of melody, harmony, and rhythm – just as a painting is not created with paint and canvas, a sculpture with marble, and poetry with words. The essence of true music is hidden inside, garnished with an artistic construction which, after all, does not create beauty, but only gives it a specific form. The true source of music is the spiritual rapture that fills the artist and the listener with admiration for beauty that cannot be expressed” (p. 13). This means that music is able to assist a person in making contact with the transcendent, which justifies the fact that so much music is inspired by religion. These are referred to as religious, ecclesiastical, sacred, or liturgical music. Although all these terms refer to transcendence, there is, however, a fundamental difference between them. There is liturgical (sacred) and non-liturgical (religious and ecclesiastical) music performed in church. Liturgical music refers exclusively to music intended for the liturgy and performed for this purpose (Pawlak 2001, p. 60), while its other forms have an artistic and decorative value and facilitate the faithful’s expression of spirituality and prayer.

Regardless of the terminology used, music inspired by transcendence, commonly referred to as religious music, illustrates how harmony can be achieved through sound and rhythm, and how true peace can be experienced in a sacred setting. Peace is a concept that can be understood in many ways and in different contexts – from personal inner and spiritual tranquillity, through interpersonal relationships, to global peace between nations, manifested in the absence of conflict.

Norwegian peace researcher John Galtung emphasised the thesis that peace should be understood in terms of a process rather than a fact. A process here means making various changes, both at the level of international relations and within the social structures of individual states. Peacebuilding, according to the author, should lead, on the one hand, to the elimination of various manifestations of violence (structural and personal) from social relations and, on the other hand, to the creation of such living conditions that are conducive to the satisfaction of human needs (Galtung 1975; after: Babicki 2017). This broad understanding of the term “peace” also has relevance to education.

Writing about the importance of peace for the development of a child, Katarzyna Olbrycht (1999) understands the term “peace” more broadly than simply the absence of war. She refers it to a state of perceived and realistically experienced security, which forms the basis of the processes of education *towards* and *for* peace. These are two similar, complementary, and interpenetrating – but not identical – approaches. Their distinction, at least in the theoretical layer, must be taken into account. The distinction stems from the meaning of the prepositions *towards* and *for*. The former suggests striving until the encounter, while the latter emphasises the aim of striving rather than the intention of reaching the destination.

Adopting this kind of interpretation of the directional prepositions, it can be said that *peace education* refers to the process of developing the attitudes, values, and skills that are needed to live in peace. It is about developing in pupils a conscious action for peace, both in their personal lives and in the wider social and global context.

In contrast, *educating for peace* emphasises the ultimate goal of the actions taken, namely the achievement of lasting peace. It is an approach that prioritises the promotion of actions aimed at building peaceful societies in which violence is absent and conflicts are resolved in a just and humane manner. *Education for peace* emphasises the responsibility of each person to contribute to the creation of a peaceful reality. It can be said that *peace education* focuses on developing the skills and attitudes needed to live in a safe environment, while *education for peace* focuses on actively working to build a world without conflict and violence.

### The concept of peace in biblical terms

In the Bible, peace is described by two words: the Hebrew *shalom* and the Greek *eirēnē*. The *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* emphasises that *shalom* comes from the word *shalem*, which means “to be untouched, complete, finished” (Dufour 1990, pp. 700–705). It therefore denotes the restoration of things to their original, pristine form and harmony. Peace in *Leviticus* “is the sum total of goods accompanying righteousness; it is the possession of a fertile land, an abundance of food and a secure dwelling place; it is the possibility of resting without any fear, it is the triumph over enemies, the possibility of multiplying; in short, it is everything by which God is with us (Leviticus 26:1–13)” (Dufour 1990, p. 701).

The Old Testament sees the essence of peace through the prism of God’s presence among people. In this context, *shalom* is not merely the absence of war, but the state of a person who lives in harmony with nature, with themselves, and with God; it is the fullness of human happiness. All this, moreover, refers not only to the individual but primarily to the communal level, to the whole nation (Bieliński 2016, p. 101).

The Greek *eirēnē*, on the other hand, has two uses in the classical language. Firstly, it denotes the order prevailing in a town or settlement. Towns had an official overseeing the *eirēnē* of the community, i.e., the overseer of public peace. In the New

Testament, *eirēnē* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom* and denotes the highest good for humankind; it signifies peace of heart that comes from knowing that one's fate is in God's hands (Lobuda 2017). The New Testament portrays peace as a new stage in the fulfilment of prophetic promises. "Peace," shown here as "the Kingdom of God," is not a completed reality on earth but a dynamic process. It will reach its fulfilment only in God, when Christ "hands over the reign to God the Father and when he overcomes all Authority, Power, and Might," and when "God will be all in all" (cf. 1 Cor 15:24, 28) (Bieliński 2016, p. 104).

God promises peace to people repeatedly through the prophets, and ultimately it is brought by Christ, of whom St Paul writes that "he himself is our peace" (Eph 2:14), and that through grace, "the peace of Christ reigns in our hearts" (Col 3:15). The message of peace is also conveyed in the liturgy of the Mass, as shaped by St Paul.

One of the most obvious biblical treatments of the term *peace* is its use as a greeting. Jesus, appearing to his disciples, greeted them with the words, "Peace be unto you" (Luke 24:30). We find a similar greeting in the Gospel of John (20:21, 27). In the letters of St Peter and St John, and in almost all the letters of St Paul, there are references attesting to the use of this word in the context of greeting or wishing peace.

It may be said that this "Apostle of the Nations" discovered the secret of happy human coexistence when, writing to the Romans (12:18), the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:15; 2 Cor 13:11), and the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:13), he instructed them to live in peace. Peter, too, in his second letter (3:14), urged Christians to remain unspotted in peace (Vagnuzzi 1997, pp. 455–459).

The main biblical connotations of the term *peace* are illustrated in Diagram 1.

The juxtaposition presented shows that Scripture, when speaking of peace, repeatedly refers to harmony and unity with God and to a sense of security based on trust in His will. Jesus Christ himself promises his disciples peace (Jn 14:27), which is different from the peace of the proverbial *pax Romana* or the peace of the stoic. Nor is it the peace of a person who lives peacefully as a slave to selfishness (Walulik 2024). Biblical peace is based on truth, justice, and love. Jesus, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 5:1–7:28), emphasises that those who actively seek to build peace are especially blessed, and that blessing is synonymous with peace. St Paul also calls for a life of peace with others, emphasising that Christians are to strive for harmony in their relationships with their fellow human beings (Rom 12:18).

A particular illustration of what links the biblical understanding of peace with sacred music and education can be found in the pieces used in the liturgy, especially the fixed parts of the Mass. During each liturgy, participants address the request to Christ the Saviour of the world: *Dona nobis pacem* ("Grant us peace"), and immediately beforehand, there is a call to the faithful gathered in community: *Offerte vobis pacem* ("Offer one another the sign of peace"). In the *Agnus Dei* prayer, the faithful ask the Saviour for mercy and peace, and by calling Him the Lamb

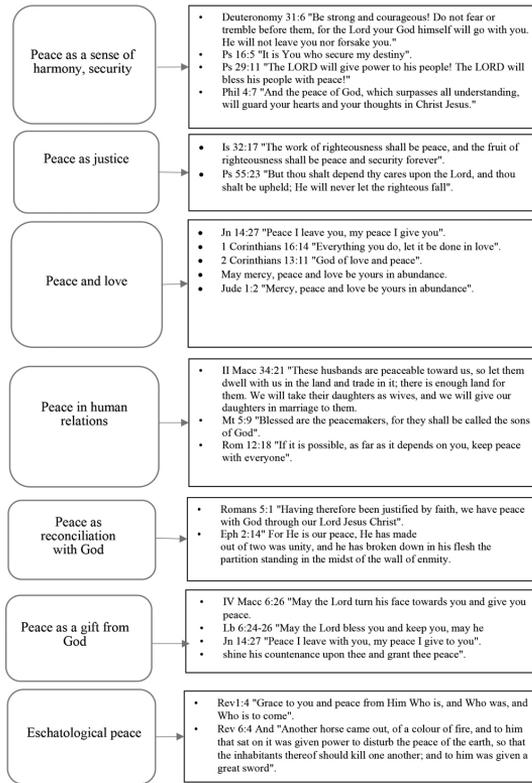


Diagram 1. A biblical view of peace

Source: Own elaboration

of God, they refer to the sacrifice offered to God – in the Old Testament, the sacrifice of a lamb, and in the New Testament, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Many composers, such as Samuel Barber and Michael W. Smith, have created moving pieces that directly evoke biblical texts, such as compositions based on the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (14:27): “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you”, or texts from Psalm 85. Although the Psalms come from the Old Testament, Christianity not only makes use of their literary qualities but, above all, by reading them from the perspective of the resurrection of Jesus, makes them part of the liturgical prayer of the Church. In this way, praying the Psalms – by appealing to the emotional, social, spiritual, and cognitive spheres of the human person – creates a space for education.

Their understanding and the appreciation of their rich content require recourse to both natural and religious cognition (Marek 2014, pp. 49–54). These two modes of cognition differ both in the types of sources to which they refer and in the extent

of their accessibility. Natural cognition has its source solely in human cognitive capacity, derived from reason, whereas supernatural cognition also encompasses realities beyond the reach of reason. In discovering truth through religious cognition, the human being relies on divine revelation as its source. This does not undermine the foundations of reality; rather, it broadens the scope of knowledge about it. These two types of cognition are not opposed but complementary.

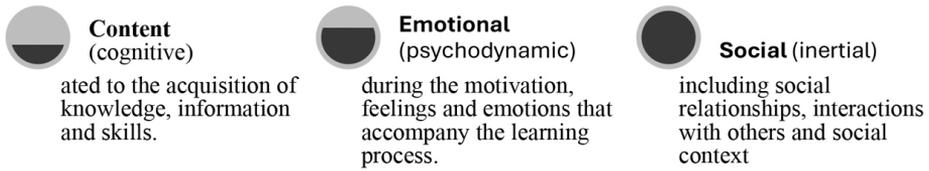
The use of both ways of learning about reality supports the search for answers to existential questions that trouble humanity and, consequently, facilitates the attainment of maturity – without which education *for* and *towards* peace is ineffective. Both the formation of attitudes, values, and skills necessary for a life of peace, and the development of conscious action for peace in the educated, require the person to be guided by a righteous conscience (Marek, 2002, p. 147). Music – especially sacred music – can play an important role in developing this capacity.

### **Cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of sacred music**

Sacred music fulfils a variety of functions in religious, spiritual, and social contexts. It plays an important educational role, influencing multiple spheres of human life: emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual. Its roots go back to Gregorian chant, whose simple, single-voice melodies accompanied liturgy and prayer. Since the Middle Ages, sacred music has evolved from monodic choral chants, through polyphony in the style of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, to large-scale oratorio, passion, and mass compositions by the great masters of classical music, such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Friedrich Händel, Claudio Monteverdi, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It plays a key role in the history of music and culture, combining spiritual and aesthetic dimensions. Two overarching goals are assigned to sacred music: the glorification of God and the sanctification of the faithful (Pawlak 2001).

Palestrina assumes that sacred music should serve the liturgy and continuous worship of God. Another expectation is that it facilitates the faithful in living out their faith, achieving inner peace and spiritual harmony, and entering into an attitude of prayer. Many composers – from Renaissance polyphonists to contemporary artists – have regarded sacred music as a way of approaching the Absolute through art. It influences the emotions of the listener, evoking awe, reflection, and contemplation. These characteristics highlight its educational nature.

Education, in this context, aligns with the broad understanding of learning proposed by Knud Illeris (2006, pp. 20–23). He argues that ‘learning’ refers not only to outcomes (what has been learned), and certainly not only to teaching, but also to internal mental processes and the interaction between the individual and their social environment. Thus, learning is an integrated process involving both interaction with one’s surroundings and internal reflection, ultimately leading to the formation of attitudes.



**Diagram 2. Dimensions of learning**

Source: own elaboration based on Illeris, 2006, pp. 24-25.

Theoretically, Illeris describes learning as comprising three dimensions (see Diagram 2), although in practice these are interrelated.

The assimilation of content is primarily a cognitive process (it includes both knowledge and motor learning, both controlled by the central nervous system). The second dimension emphasises that all learning is simultaneously an emotional process – what the technical language of psychology defines as a psychodynamic process. It involves the psychic energy transmitted through feelings, drives, attitudes, and motivations. Taken together, these mobilise learning and, at the same time, constitute conditions that learning influences and by which it can be shaped. Learning is also a social process, occurring in interactions between an individual and their environment. It is dependent on historical and social conditions; thus, this dimension has two interrelated levels: an interpersonal one, and a more fundamental social one, which shapes the nature of interaction and individual engagement (Illeris 2006, pp. 24–25).

The three aspects of learning identified by Illeris form the learning experience, which is of central importance in education. Experience is embedded in a person’s way of being and enables them to overcome one-sidedness or limitations in cognition (Charitanski 1992, p. 235). This highlights the need to include the spiritual dimension of the person in educational processes. Zbigniew Marek, drawing on David L. Fleming (2013, pp. 5–6), points out that spirituality is a set of attitudes, customs (traditions), and values upheld by an individual or group. Without taking the spiritual dimension into account, achieving maturity—which is, after all, a core goal of education – is at least difficult, if not impossible. The spiritual dimension enables not only a turn toward the Transcendent, but above all the discovery and articulation of the meaning of human life (Marek 2022, p. 149).

Sacred music, due to its profound spiritual and emotional content, can effectively support the process of human maturation in an integral way. Each of the aforementioned areas is responsible for different aspects of shaping attitudes and constructing a value framework. Sacred music – by integrating religious, artistic, and communal elements – can thus serve as a powerful educational tool. This is particularly evident in the case of choral music. Choral singing is not only a lesson in performance, but also (and perhaps above all) a lesson in mutual respect,

as participants must listen to each other and cooperate to achieve harmony – both literally and figuratively. It fosters interpersonal bonds, strengthens a sense of belonging, and teaches the value of working for the common good.

### **Sacred music as a way of discovering the value of peace**

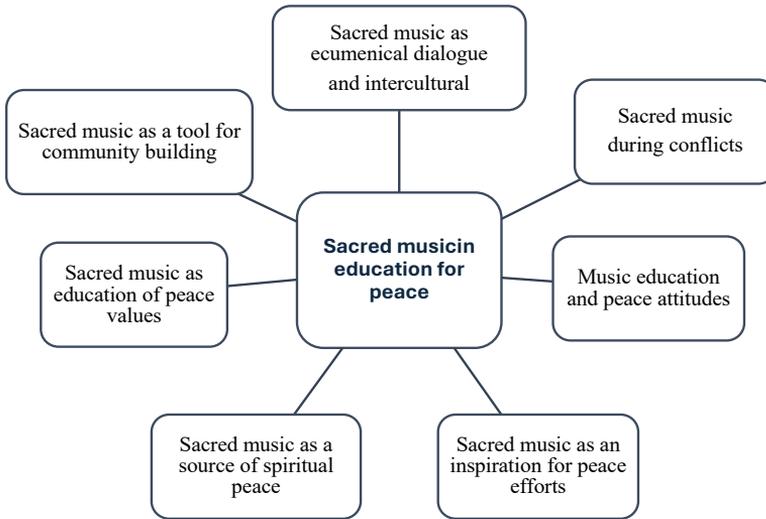
In shaping responsibility for peace, it is important not only to convey content, but also to develop skills in cooperation and communication. When fostering peaceful attitudes by drawing on the potential of sacred music, all dimensions of learning should be taken into account. In various religious traditions, sacred music has functioned not only as a form of worship, but also as a means of expressing and promoting universal values such as love, peace, respect for others, and the search for inner harmony.

The diverse aspects of the educational role of sacred music are presented in Diagram 3.

This overview shows the broad spectrum of tasks that sacred music can fulfil in educational processes. These arise from both its content and its form, fostering the development of all dimensions of the human person. In the cognitive domain, knowledge of peace is essential. It is important to provide young people with up-to-date information that helps them understand the concept of peace itself, as well as the causes and consequences of conflicts, both on personal and global levels.

The texts of many sacred musical works are imbued with values that promote peace, reconciliation, and love of neighbour. Compositions such as masses, cantatas, and motets often include messages of love, forgiveness, compassion, and unity. Examples include the *Magnificat*, the *Mass in B Minor*, and cantatas such as *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* by Johann Sebastian Bach. A particularly relevant example is *Peace I Leave With You* by John Rutter—a well-known contemporary composer of sacred music. His choral piece beautifully interprets Jesus' words from the Gospel of John. Another reference is *Ubi caritas et amor*, one of the oldest Christian hymns, rooted in antiphons written by St Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians. The text speaks of divine love, Christian unity, and a wish for peace and blessing (Editorial *Towards Splendour*).

Many sacred music composers have drawn inspiration from the ideal of world peace. For example, Ludwig van Beethoven included a prayer for peace in his *Missa Solemnis*. Contemporary works by Arvo Pärt, such as *Spiegel im Spiegel*, *Fratres*, or *Te Deum*, often carry themes of peace and reconciliation, inspiring both religious and non-religious listeners to work toward a better world. Sacred music can also support the development of critical thinking through the analysis of conflict and reflection on peacebuilding strategies at various levels of society. It conveys religious, moral, and ethical content, shaping awareness of peace-related



**Diagram 3. Sacred music in education for and for peace**

Source: own elaboration based on: Szymańska, Szymański 2008, pp.317-328; Pawlak 2001, pp.67-84.

values. In the Christian tradition, it also promotes ecumenical values, highlighting the social dimension of sacred music.

The social dimension of learning shapes both meaning and identity (Illeris, 2006, p. 151). Sacred music in this context fosters social awareness of peace, supports the development of communication skills, promotes civic engagement (e.g. local initiatives, peace projects, volunteering), and reinforces a sense of community and respect for diversity. Children raised in Christian communities are exposed to the values proclaimed by Jesus from an early age. This shapes their worldview and their sensitivity to human goodness and the world. Sacred music thus contributes to building peaceful communities rooted in shared values and spiritual experience, creating a foundation for interreligious dialogue and tolerance. In this way, it becomes part of intercultural education.

In the context of multiculturalism and interreligious dialogue, sacred music demonstrates its power in concerts and festivals that bring together musical traditions from different faiths. These events foster mutual respect and tolerance. Sacred music allows listeners to perceive universal values—peace, love, and solidarity—that unite religions and promote ecumenism across cultures. Saint John (Jn 13:34–35) makes this message—the new commandment – central to Jesus’ farewell discourse: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another [...] By this all will know that you are my disciples [...]*” (Vercruyssen 2001, p. 16).

Music, by its very nature, accentuates the emotional dimension of the human being and creates space for reflection on feelings. This is particularly important in

sacred music, where calm melodies and harmonious tones help the listener enter a state of contemplation and inner peace. In doing so, music touches the deepest layers of personality, where spiritual feeling resides. As a source of spiritual peace, sacred music invites listeners into a reflective state, fostering concentration and a sense of harmony with God and others. Examples include Gregorian chants such as *Missa de Angelis*, Taizé canons like *Dona nobis pacem* (“Give us peace”), Hildegard of Bingen’s *O Virtus Sapientiae*, and Olivier Messiaen’s *La Nativité du Seigneur*. With their simplicity and tranquil rhythm, these works create a profound spiritual atmosphere and simultaneously express a plea for both inner and external peace.

Similarly, works by Tomás Luis de Victoria (*O Magnum Mysterium*) or Henryk Górecki (*Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, No. 3) demonstrate that sacred music can evoke deep reflection, offering consolation, calm, and hope. By calling for love, forgiveness, and compassion, it shapes sensitivity to the suffering and needs of others. Sacred music is often used during difficult moments, such as bereavement, offering spiritual healing. During times of war or persecution, it has helped to build hope and strengthen faith in peace.

Practically speaking, the spiritual formation supported by sacred music is expressed through events such as sacred concerts – public prayers for peace and collective reflection on the need to end armed conflicts. Such musical experiences can inspire peace activism and express solidarity with the victims of violence. A good example is the Polish religious song *Pokój Tobie, Ziemię moja* (“Peace to You, My Homeland”), which conveys a message of peace and love for the native land. Another is *Pokój i dobro* (“Peace and Goodness”)—a traditional Franciscan hymn echoing the attitude of St Francis, who was a passionate advocate of fraternity and peacemaking. In his preaching, he sought to extinguish enmity and lay the foundations for new conditions of peace (Vagnuzzi 1997, pp. 455–459). “Peace and goodness” was also one of the oldest forms of greeting in the ancient Middle East, used in interpersonal communication and correspondence among the Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and other peoples of the region (Vagnuzzi 1997, pp. 455–459).

### Summary

A reflection on the place of sacred music in the process of educating *for* and *towards* peace – conducted in the context of the biblical understanding of the term *peace*, Illeris’s three-dimensional concept of learning, and the religious pedagogy of Z. Marek – shows that sacred music has the capacity to reach the very essence of humanity. Both its content and its form support the development of inner peace, allowing individuals to find harmony with themselves, the surrounding world, and with God – the giver and source of true peace. By influencing the cognitive, social,

emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the human person, sacred music creates a space for deepening peace consciousness both individually and collectively.

Peace ideals are integral to the musical education of children and young people. Music nurtures sensitivity to spiritual and ethical values, and learning to sing or play instruments – particularly in sacred contexts – fosters patience, cooperation, and openness to others.

Sacred music thus provides a space for educating *for* and *towards* peace in an integral way, encompassing the full range of personal development. Each of these dimensions contributes to the formation of peace-oriented attitudes, whether through the transmission of peace-related content, the development of emotional awareness, the strengthening of communal bonds, or the cultivation of inner harmony.

Moreover, sacred music serves as an important tool for promoting peace and dialogue across generations, peoples, cultures, and religions. Performing multiple functions in both religious and social contexts, it naturally aligns with the goals of peace education. Through its spiritual, moral, and emotional depth, sacred music supports the development of pro-social and ethical attitudes, becoming a powerful educational medium for inspiring a culture of peace.

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