

# The Teacher as a Shepherd: A Philosophical Metaphor for Transformative Christian Education in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study addressed the gap in understanding the philosophical foundations of Christian education among teachers in Indonesia, emphasizing the need for a transformative approach to teaching. The research aimed to construct the metaphor of “the teacher as a shepherd” to provide a philosophical framework for Christian education in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative, literature-based methodology, the study analyzed biblical texts, educational theories, and prior research on metaphors in education. The findings highlighted 1) the importance of a philosophical foundation in Christian education; 2) the metaphor of the teacher as a shepherd; 3) the roles of the Christian teacher as a shepherd; 4) essential qualities of a shepherd-teacher; and 5) transformative learning as the goal. The significance of metaphors in shaping teachers' professional identity and guiding their pedagogical practices. Specifically, the metaphor of a shepherd encapsulates roles such as guiding, protecting, nurturing, and fostering transformative experiences for students. This metaphor aligns with biblical-theological principles and offers a culturally relevant framework for Indonesian Christian educators. The study concluded that adopting the "teacher as a shepherd" metaphor enhances teachers' understanding of their vocation, fostering ethical responsibility and spiritual growth. Recommendation is to conduct long-term research to evaluate the sustained effects of adopting a shepherd-based educational philosophy on teacher behavior and student transformation. The contribution is proposing transformative role for educators.

Keywords: Christian education, philosophical metaphor, teacher as a shepherd, transformative learning

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## **Introduction**

The background of this paper is the fact that not all Christian teachers understand and have a clear philosophy in exercising their profession and calling. Ridwanudin (2015, pp. 57-74), in his experience as a teacher and as a trainer of teachers, said that teachers have very little understanding of the philosophy of education that leads to the practice of learning in the classroom. In his experience, he found teachers who do not understand the reason or purpose of teaching, so they are only in the classroom for knowledge transfer. Often, a teacher is only seen as a knowledge operator charged with filling the cognitive dimension of students.

Understanding educational philosophy will influence the personal qualities of the teacher. Lase and Hulu (2020) confirm this idea, stating that not all Christian teachers demonstrate the quality and integrity that they should. This situation arises because some Christian teachers do not fully realize that one of the skills, they must possess is spiritual skill (Marmon, 2013, pp. 424-431). Consequently, such Christian teachers only perform mechanical tasks in the classroom but do not model for their students how to think and behave. The previous research shows the lack of educational philosophy among Christian teachers in Indonesia.

The philosophy of education will determine the concepts and practices within it. It provides educators with a foundation of responsibility for the nature of each learning practice in schools. The study of philosophy trains teachers to think about what to do and why. The role of the philosophical foundation of education is to guide what and how education should be conducted. Specifically in the context of Christian education, the philosophy of education will help teachers understand the role and call of God (Tung, 2021). Christian educational philosophy provides a foundation not only for the development of thought (theology) but also for the spiritual growth of teachers and students (Marmon, 2013; J. Simanjuntak, 2021, pp. 16-19). For this reason, Christian education must have a solid basis in order that it may become consistent and purposeful, that it may have relevant and current curricular content, and that it may have effective and efficient methods and ways of implementation. Therefore, before the implementation of the teaching and learning process, educators must first strengthen the philosophical foundation (Suyitno, 2009, p. 1).

The teachers who understand the philosophy of education will understand the purpose of education. Thus, they will think carefully about how students learn, what students should learn, how students can be actively involved in the learning process, how students' learning outcomes can build their attitudes, and so on. Roberson (2000) states that philosophical education does not

dictate what teachers should do in the classroom for learning but rather why they should do it and how they should do it.

Philosophy in education also guides the ethics of a teacher. Moral philosophy will provide a framework for the nature of the value concepts of good, bad, right, wrong, and so on (Tas'adi, 2016, pp. 189–198). The idea of morality is needed as a framework for the ethics of a teacher (Mulyadi, 2019, pp. 1–11). The understanding of ethics as a moral philosophy of teaching will encourage educators not only to be teachers of knowledge but also to live their vocation with integrity and responsibility. Teachers will realize that they are role models to be emulated by their students. When teachers have philosophy of education, they become intentional, reflective, spiritually grounded educators who go beyond instruction to model transformation.

In particular, the transformative learning framework sees the orientation of learning as producing fundamental changes in the learner. According to Mezirow (2000, pp. 3–33), a proponent of this theory, transformative learning is defined as a process that brings about the experience of shifting the frame of reference (mindset, habits of mind, perspective of meaning) of a problematic set of assumptions and expectations and making it more inclusive, sorting, open, reflective, and emotionally changeable. Cranton and Taylor (2013, pp. 35–47) understands transformative learning as a learning activity aimed at the process of making learners aware of the flaws or weaknesses of perspectives and their underlying assumptions, and then moving to a new perspective that is deemed appropriate. Through transformative learning, students are conditioned to constantly reflect, question, and challenge their previous perspectives (Jonassen & Land, 2000).

In this framework, a teacher is one of the important components of creating a transformative experience. Giroux (2004) refers to teachers as transformative intellectuals. It means that a teacher has the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to question, understand, interrogate, and ultimately act as an agent of change for structural struggles and injustices in their context (Giroux, 2004). In this case, the teachers must have a strong philosophical foundation to carry out their role and function to create transformative experiences for the learners. In the context of Christian education, transformation happens when both teacher and student let the Holy Spirit work within them (Zendrato & Agatha, 2023, pp. 227–242). The explanation above states that the goal of education is transformative learning.

One of the efforts to help teachers have an established philosophical foundation for education is to build a metaphor that describes who, what, and

how the teacher's vocation is carried out. This effort is not new in the context of education. The metaphor is a way of thinking grounded on the Cognitive Theory framework. It is often used to construct human thinking patterns about the world and reality. Lakoff and Johnson's work made a real contribution to the development of metaphors for the formation of educational philosophy in the last three decades (Lakoff, 2008).

Saban (2006), in his study, he categorizes the various metaphors that have been used to describe a philosophy of education, namely:

1. Animal metaphors, i.e., "snail," "fish," "lemming," "duck," "mule," "cow," "bird," "mouse," "cheetah," "camel," "donkey," "squirrel," and "sea cucumber."
2. Object metaphors, i.e., "sponge," "crayon," "roller coaster," "bump & go toy," "wrecking ball," "tide," "curtain," "tornado," "strainer," and "computer program."
3. Human metaphors, i.e., "toddler," "kid eating candy," "observer," "entrepreneur," "kid in a candy store," "baby," "child," "hurdler," and "person with Alzheimer's."
4. Action metaphors, i.e., "drying a counter," "climbing a tree," and "eating."
5. Archetypes of Professional Identity Metaphor: shopkeeper, driver, jockey, technician, potter, doctor, mechanic, commander, judge, prison guard, parent, babysitter, gardener, juggler, comedian, tool provider, compass, tour guide, coach, and conductor.

Meanwhile, various metaphors for educational philosophy have also been proposed in the context of Christian education. For example, Boehlke (2000) says that the Christian educator is an advocate; Intarti (2016) describes the Christian teacher as a motivator; Sidjabat (2011) argues that a Christian teacher is a mentor. Homrighausen and Enklaar (1974) say that the Christian teacher is an evangelist. The metaphor described is a tool for building educational philosophy.

In distinction to various previous studies, this article seeks to make a different contribution, namely, the teacher as a shepherd. The philosophical exploration of this metaphor is in relation to the context of Indonesia as an agricultural country that is familiar with the existence of shepherds and their relationship with the flock that is being shepherded. Previous research has not typically contextualized metaphors within a specific socio-cultural and religious setting like this. They focus only on role identification; this study explicitly connects the metaphor of the shepherd to the goal of transformative learning. The shepherd is seen not just as a nurturer, but as a transformational guide aligning spiritual formation with educational purpose.

The philosophical construction of this metaphor was also chosen in relation to the strong biblical-theological foundation of the role and function of the shepherd (literal and figurative) in the socio-cultural context of the narrative in the Bible. It particularly highlights the role of the Holy Spirit and biblical narratives of shepherding as central to shaping a teacher's vocation. It adds a spiritual and moral-philosophical layer often missing in secular or general metaphor research.

Therefore, the purpose of this discussion is to construct a metaphor to describe the form, role, and quality of a teacher in order to provide a transformative experience for the students who study under them. Some of the research questions to be answered are: How does the metaphor shape the philosophy of Christian education? How can the shepherd metaphor be used as a philosophy of education in Christian religious education? How does the Bible provide a theological basis for constructing the metaphor of the teacher as a shepherd? And what are the roles and qualities of a Christian teacher who sees himself as a shepherd for his flock? The novelty of the research is its conceptual innovation (teacher as shepherd metaphor), contextual grounding in Indonesian culture, and integration of Christian theology with educational philosophy to propose a transformative role for educators.

The conceptual framework of the paper is summarized in Figure 1 below.

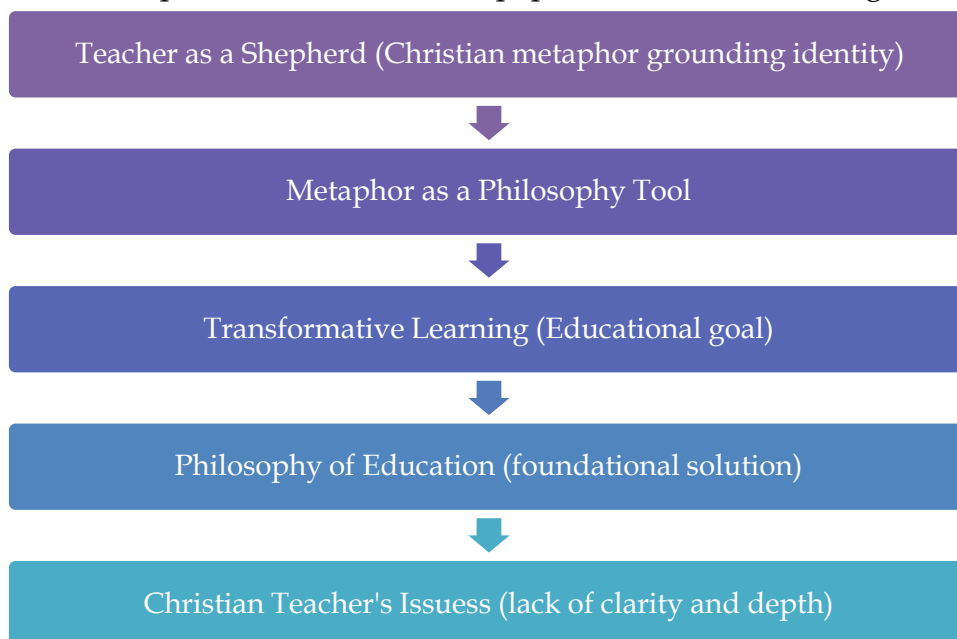


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Finally, the purpose and objectives of the study are firstly, to address the gap among Christian teachers, especially regarding their role, calling, and ethical responsibilities. Secondly, it is to construct a metaphorical framework that is

teacher as a shepherd which provides a biblically and theologically grounded philosophical model for Christian education. Thirdly, to contribute to the development of Christian educational philosophy by offering a culturally contextualized metaphor that reflects both Indonesia's agrarian setting and the biblical imagery of shepherding. Fourthly, to guide teachers in becoming not only conveyors of knowledge but also role models and transformative intellectuals who foster deep moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth in students. The last is to support transformative learning practices in classrooms by anchoring teaching roles in spiritual integrity, reflective action, and biblical theology. For specifically, the research aims to construct the metaphor of "the teacher as a shepherd" to provide a philosophical framework for Christian education in Indonesia.

### **Method**

This research employs a qualitative research method. Theoretically, Creswell and Creswell (2018), one of the most recognized authors on research methods defines that qualitative research is an approach for understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Meanwhile, the research approach utilized in this study is literature-based study. In accordance with the nature of this approach, the research relies entirely on existing published literature – books, academic journal articles, reports, and other scholarly sources.

The research approach deployed to explore the philosophical concepts of Christian education including biblical references, educational theories, and philosophical metaphors. This study focuses on the context of Christian education in Indonesia, with special attention to the role of teachers as educators who have a strong philosophical foundation. The setting is a Christian education community, both formal and non-formal, in Indonesian society that has agrarian cultural roots.

This article does not involve any specific population or sample as it is a conceptual study. However, the target of this research discussion is Christian teachers in Indonesia, especially those involved in Christian religious education. This study proposes the metaphor of "the teacher as a shepherd" as a philosophical approach to strengthen the role of the teacher in providing transformational

experiences to students in accordance to its nature (Jatmiko, 2021; R. Simanjuntak et al., 2021).

The data utilized in the article come from secondary literature sources such as the Bible, educational theory (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, 2013; Illeris, 2014; Mezirow, 2000; Welton & Mezirow, 1995) and previous research on metaphors in education. The analysis is carried out through an interpretive approach to literary texts and the Bible. The author links philosophical concepts to the practice of Christian education using the metaphor of "shepherd."

The results of this study are presented descriptively. The data collected from the literature were analyzed by identifying key themes and patterns, which are then explained in detail through narrative descriptions. This descriptive approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the research problem, emphasizing context, meaning, and interpretation.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Metaphor as an Educational Philosophy***

Teachers who study and understand the philosophical foundation of their education will make various efforts for the success of the learning process. In other words, a teacher who has a strong philosophical foundation will carefully think about how students learn, what students should learn, how students can be actively involved in the learning process, how students' learning outcomes can build their attitudes, and so on.

Using metaphor to construct a philosophy is not new in educational discourse. In simple terms, a metaphor functions as an analogy that enables one phenomenon to be understood in relation to another. Quale (2002) explains that a metaphor is a descriptive analogy in which the phenomenon under discussion (A) is illuminated by drawing a "connecting line" to another phenomenon (B) that is assumed to be already familiar. In this process, selected features of the known domain (B) are mapped onto the less familiar domain (A) in order to support understanding. Contemporary research confirms that metaphors are more than rhetorical devices; they act as cognitive and pedagogical tools that help explain complex educational phenomena by grounding them in familiar conceptual structures (Herranz-Hernández, 2025; Norscini & Daniela, 2024). For example, studies show that metaphors help teachers and learners make sense of

instructional challenges and learning processes by reframing abstract ideas into more accessible terms (Larsson, 2025), and that they remain central to educational discourse about emerging educational practices, such as the use of AI in learning environments (Serpa & Ferreira, 2018). Thus, metaphors continue to play a functional role in educational theory and practice by linking the unknown to the known in order to facilitate understanding and meaning-making.

Using metaphor to construct a philosophy involves a cognitive process that connects two different ideas, often bridging concrete and abstract domains. In this metaphorical process, one conceptual domain (the source) is structurally *projected* onto another (the target) to facilitate understanding of the latter (Yob, 2003). This projection involves a systematic mapping in which features of the source domain help shape how the target domain is conceptualized, enabling learners and educators to grasp complex or abstract phenomena through familiar analogical structures (Colston, 2023). Contemporary cognitive research concurs that metaphor is more than mere linguistic ornamentation; it is a fundamental component of human cognition that organizes conceptual thought by linking disparate domains of experience (Colston, 2023; Shi & Khoo, 2023). Metaphors thus not only serve as tools of analogy to explain one idea via another, but also inherently carry framing effects that emphasize certain aspects of the target while downplaying others, shaping how individuals' reason and make evaluative judgments. Practically speaking, establishing metaphor as a philosophical approach invites educators to explore comparisons, recognize structural similarities, and use one situation to *illustrate and make sense of* another through intentional and educationally meaningful conceptual mappings.

Metaphors provide a useful window into teachers' professional thinking and cognition. Even the use of imagination in the right way is very effective in achieving transformative learning in Christian education (Dewantoro & Sinaga, 2023). Saban (2006), in his classic literature review, points out several important reasons why metaphors are needed to describe a teacher's educational philosophy. The following is a list of 10 different functions of metaphors in education, according to Saban (2006), Larsson (2025), Schellings et al. (2024), McCandless et al. (2025) for more recent studies.

1. Metaphors as a blueprint of professional thinking (Bozik, 2002; Inbar, 1996; Martínez et al., 2001).

2. Metaphors as an archetype of professional identity (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Fenwick, 2000; Saban, 2004).
3. Metaphor as a pedagogical device (Hoban, 2000).
4. Metaphors as a medium of reflection (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Perry & Cooper, 2001).
5. Metaphors as a tool for evaluation (Kemp, 1999).
6. Metaphor as a research tool (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Mahlios & Maxson, 1998).
7. Metaphor as a curriculum theory (Kliebard, 1982)
8. Metaphor as a mental model (Cook-Sather, 2003).
9. Metaphors as an instrument of discovery (Hagstrom et al., 2000).
10. Metaphor as a springboard for change (Gillis & Johnson, 2002).

The above list shows the importance of metaphor in articulating philosophy. The image (with the metaphor) will help a teacher to crystallize his role, function, and duties. This metaphor will be the basis of ontology (metaphysics), epistemology, and axiology in education. The study of metaphysics in the philosophy of education will help educators to implicitly control the purpose of education, to know the world of learners and their identity as teachers. The implication of the epistemological foundation is to provide a basis for the preparation of educational content that is harmonious and relevant so that goals can be achieved more effectively.

This ontological foundation will then become a reference for an educator's epistemological foundation. The epistemological dimension will question what has been given to the learner subject and why the knowledge is given. With this framework, educators will be guided to the level of axiology, which will have an impact on the application and implementation of theories and concepts into more concrete practices (Tung, 2021). The teachers' metaphors will affect how teachers interpret the teaching-learning process in the classroom, how they encourage students to learn continuously, and how they can create educational innovations based on their teaching experiences.

Many metaphors have been developed to make the learning process more effective. Basically, these metaphors are used to describe the Who, What, How, and Why of an educational process. This fact explains the effectiveness of using metaphors as a philosophical foundation for teachers.

### ***The Shepherd as a Metaphor in Christian Education***

In the glossary of Christianity, the term “shepherd” is not unfamiliar. The word is used extensively in the Bible at the conceptual level, as well as in the practical life of a follower of Christ. In the Bible, the word “shepherd” is used in both a literal and metaphorical sense. In a literal context, the term shepherd refers to someone whose job is to herd livestock, such as goats, sheep, oxen, cows, and so on (Gan, 2022). The profession of a shepherd is related to the domestication of the first generation on earth. Genesis 4:2 is the text that first mentions Abel's occupation as a shepherd. Later, Jabal is mentioned as a nomadic and agrarian person who domesticated animals for use (Gen. 4:20).

The shepherd profession is a favored occupation related to livestock commodities for economic needs, consumption, and worship rituals. The existence of this profession is also related to the function of livestock as an indicator of one's wealth in Near Eastern society. Generally, this job is categorized into two: people who work as shepherds for others, such as Jacob (Gen 30:31) or Moses (Ex 3:1), and people who herd their livestock, like Jacob's sons (Gen 46:32). Although there are different types of shepherds, they all have the same basic duties: Feeding, protecting, guiding, and various other caregiving duties.

Whereas in a metaphorical sense, the term shepherd is used to describe a person who has functions and roles inherent to a shepherd in the true sense. Figuratively speaking, the role of the shepherds is in the mental and spiritual care of the people under their supervision. This strategic role and function is the background to the biblical idea of making the profession of a shepherd refer to the task entrusted to someone to be a caretaker of the soul and spirituality of God's people (Marmon, 2013).

The role of nurturing and caring for God's “flock” is closely related to the function of education, both in the formal and non-formal. Sentosa said that a Christian educator must teach by nurturing, fostering, maturing, and providing a living example. A Christian teacher has an important role in contributing to the maturation of the faith of those being taught. As a shepherd, a teacher has a special calling.

#### **Feeding**

David, in Psalm 23, says that his Shepherd assures him of green pastures, still waters, and a satisfying meal, and that the shepherd's presence brings a

profound sense of comfort, calm, and reassurance. This biblical shepherd figure has long informed metaphors of care and guidance in educational contexts. Contemporary research exploring the shepherd metaphor in Christian education shows that teachers who view their role as akin to a shepherd consciously embrace both pastoral care and instructional responsibility, especially within faith-based schooling, where they see themselves as guiding and nurturing their students' intellectual and spiritual growth rather than merely transmitting content (Hermawati et al., 2022). In addition, studies of pastoral care in broader educational settings highlight how educators' caring relationships with students—characterized by emotional support, empathy, and holistic concern—contribute significantly to both student well-being and learning outcomes, extending well beyond purely academic dimensions of schooling (Liu & Liu, 2024; Seary & Willans, 2020). These pastoral functions align with the idea that a shepherd teacher provides “quality food” not only for cognitive development but also for emotional, moral, and spiritual nourishment (Mart, 2018).

The concept of the teacher as a shepherd resonates with holistic education philosophies that treat students as whole persons with interrelated cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Holistic education research emphasizes that teaching should attend to *all aspects of learners' development*, fostering meaning, values, compassion, and community engagement alongside academic achievement. Similarly, educational scholars have described pastoral care systems in schools as integral to creating supportive learning environments that improve both student engagement and overall well-being, suggesting that the shepherd-teacher model embodies a humanistic and relational form of pedagogy (Seary & Willans, 2020). In this view, students are not framed as isolated cognitive entities but as integrated human beings whose flourishing requires sustained attention to their intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual lives.

### Nurturing

A Christian teacher must recognize their calling from God to care for each individual entrusted to them. Within Christian educational thought, teaching is understood not merely as instructional delivery but as a form of pastoral responsibility that involves spiritual guidance, relational care, and ethical commitment. Framed through the biblical metaphor of shepherding, Christian educators are encouraged to view each learner as a precious individual rather

than an interchangeable member of a group. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:12–14, which emphasizes the refusal to abandon even “a single one” of the flock, highlights the moral attentiveness, responsibility, and sacrificial care expected of those entrusted with others' lives. Contemporary research on teacher vocation confirms that many educators experience their work as a calling that shapes professional identity, motivation, and commitment to students' holistic well-being, particularly within faith-based educational contexts (Hermawati et al., 2022; Seary & Willans, 2020).

This shepherding calling further underscores the responsibility of Christian teachers to attend intentionally to the spiritual well-being of their students. Empirical studies on pastoral care in education demonstrate that when teachers adopt a relational, care-oriented posture, students experience increased emotional security, moral formation, and spiritual resilience alongside academic development (Seary & Willans, 2020). Recent research in Christian educational environments likewise indicates that spiritual caregiving practices—such as modeling faith, offering guidance, and cultivating trusting relationships—play a significant role in supporting students' holistic growth and psychological well-being (Liu & Liu, 2024). In this sense, the Christian teacher's role as shepherd extends beyond cognitive instruction to embody a spirit of sacrificial commitment that reflects Christ's concern for the whole person, aligning educational practice with a deeply humanistic and theologically grounded vision of teaching.

### Guiding

In the learning process, students may encounter their own version of the “valley of the shadow of death” akin to David's experience in Psalm 23, where disorienting dilemmas and academic challenges can generate stress, anxiety, or disengagement. In such situations, teachers who act as guides and sources of emotional support play a critical role in helping learners persist and remain hopeful (Resane, 2014). Research on teacher emotional support indicates that when educators provide consistent encouragement and care, students demonstrate increased academic self-efficacy and resilience, which in turn enhances their engagement and ability to navigate difficulties in learning (Guo et al., 2025). Contemporary resilience research further suggests that teachers who model adaptive responses to adversity and maintain a supportive classroom environment help students develop psychological and academic resilience,

enabling learners to recover from setbacks and maintain persistence toward learning goals (J. Lu et al., 2024). Such findings corroborate the pastoral metaphor in Christian education in which the teacher's presence and optimism guide students toward "still waters and green pastures," offering not only academic guidance but also emotional reassurance.

A teacher is therefore required to possess not only pedagogical competence but also character strengths such as empathy, patience, and relational commitment, which together embody a model of guided care. Studies on teacher resilience and care underscore that educators' own capacity to cope with professional challenges directly influences their ability to support students through adversity; resilient teachers are more effective in fostering trusting relationships and motivating learners through challenging experiences (J. I. Lu, 2021). By exemplifying emotional strength and instructional competence, the teacher becomes a role model whose guidance helps students approach their own learning challenges with confidence and purpose. In this way, the shepherd teacher functions not only as an instructor of academic content but also as a mentor and supporter of students' holistic growth, helping them progress academically while cultivating resilience, optimism, and a sense of well-being.

### ***Biblical-Theological Basis of the Teacher as Shepherd***

The biblical-theological basis of the teacher as a shepherd is God's shepherding. The theme of the relationship between God and the people described as "shepherd and the flock" is found in both the Old and New Testaments. The prophet Isaiah describes God as a shepherd who is attentive and compassionate toward His people (Is 40:11). This metaphor depicts the other side of God's might and power, namely God's tenderness and care for His shepherd's people (Telaumbanua, 2019). Isaiah uses the expressions lead, guide, gather, protect, and feed to show his care and responsibility for the flock under his care. The text describes YHWH's relationship with Israel not only as God and His people but also as the Great Shepherd who teaches, cares for, and nurtures His people.

God appointed and selected certain people with specific tasks so that this maintenance function could continue to be experienced by the people. These leaders represented God's presence to His people (Num 27:15-17). God sent deliverers such as Moses and Joshua to lead them from Egypt to the promised land and provide various teachings on how to live as God's people. God

appointed judges and kings so that the people would continue to experience God's guidance, teaching, and leading through them (2 Sam 7:7; Ps 78:7a, 71b-72). God designed these leaders to reflect God's shepherding model. Like God, the leaders are expected by God to nurture, guide, care for, and teach God's people. Likewise, leaders should be able to position themselves as shepherds who love and care for the people.

This shepherding mandate continued into the church age. The Lord Jesus Himself gave this pastoral mandate to His disciples after His resurrection (Jn 21:15). This calling is then believed to be attached to the leadership function in the institution He founded, namely the church (Mt 16: 18). In particular, the presence of leaders in the church was indispensable in relation to the needs of the young early church. The early church had an urgent need to defend its faith and beliefs before the public and the “attackers,” as well as those seeking the truth (Acts 5:27-32; 6:9-10; 26:1-32). This young church was shaken by various teachings, both those that were beginning to shift and those that openly opposed the message delivered by the Apostles. The role of leaders who can teach and provide healthy faith nutrition is indispensable.

The existence of the young church in the New Testament context requires serious guidance and care so that the church grows healthily. The Acts of the Apostles records congregational issues that need decisions from those believed to have authority and credibility (Jatmiko, 2020). In this situation, the Apostles appointed elders (*presbyters*) to take care of local church matters to provide teaching and continue the pastoral function to the congregation (Acts 11: 30; 16: 4; 20: 17). This leadership role is also believed to be the same as the term overseer (*episkopos*) used by Paul (Phil 1:1). In its development, this role was also attached to the term “bishop” (Rom 12:8; Acts 20:17,28; 1 Pet 5:2).

A teaching role is attached to the office of leadership in the church in addition to performing the pastoral role of the congregation, including praying for the sick (Jas 5:14) and performing necessary organizational tasks. Elders must take care of themselves and the flock of God, which is entrusted to them spiritually (Acts 20:28). They should visit the homes of the congregation to teach, encourage, and provide moral and spiritual care.

### **Implications**

### ***The Roles of the Teacher as a Shepherd***

The educational philosophy of the Teacher as a Shepherd encourages a person who is called to teach with a more purposeful role. What a teacher does with a clear philosophical basis will be more effectively planned and have an impact on the transformative learning experience of students. Based on the biblical study in the previous section, the role of a Christian teacher as a shepherd can be articulated by:

#### **First, Teaching and Educating**

An established philosophical foundation for teachers will help them perform their functions optimally. The teacher's role as a shepherd will be related to the task of “feeding” the flock being shepherded. This task is carried out by teaching, which is an activity to provide knowledge, train skills, provide experience guidance, design teaching, implement learning, and evaluate the learning process (Anditya et al., 2017). In addition to teaching, in the frame of transformative learning thinking, a teacher who is a shepherd has a role in educating not only by focusing on the content but also the values of students (Lase & Hulu, 2020). So, the teacher as a transformative shepherd is not only oriented towards content transmission (transfer of knowledge) and presenting bank-style education (banking method). However, a shepherd teacher must act as a transformative agent by teaching values to students (transfer of values), (Linhart, 2016). It is these values that a teacher internalizes to convey a transformative experience for students.

In relation to this role, a shepherd teacher is required to have adequate qualifications. A Christian teacher must be able to teach professionally. A teacher must master the science of pedagogy and be skilled in implementing learning. Insight, knowledge, and experience will be important assets to make a shepherd teacher able to carry out the teaching role.

Then, as an educator, shepherd teachers are not only required to be fluent in teaching values but also actually to live what they teach. The values taught in the classroom will be effectively embedded when they are reflected in daily life behavior. As a shepherd (leader) for students, a teacher must appear as a person who truly lives what they teach (Telaumbanua, 2019). What they do is what they teach students. What they teach students is what they practice.

### Second, Guiding

As reflected in the study of the theological foundations of the teacher's role as a shepherd, one of the important roles of a shepherd is to provide guidance and direction to the flock. The Bible consistently portrays both God and leaders in the role of guide to the people. Guidance is a relational role that a teacher performs beyond the typical administrative functions. Guiding is assisting individuals on an ongoing basis (Debora & Han, 2020). In Freire's framework, guidance is needed to bring about the experience of conscientization so that a student can become aware of their situation and see things that need to change (Freire, 1974). This process will help the student to understand himself so that he is able to act reasonably, in accordance with the demands and circumstances of the school environment, family and society, and life in general. Guidance helps individuals achieve their optimal development as social beings.

A Christian teacher who serves as a shepherd will lead students to the truth from the Bible itself. The flock not only needs to be given nutritious food but also needs direction so that they do not get lost. As a guide, the shepherd teacher must always be present in the midst of the flock, walk with them, and with them also produce something useful for the benefit of the school's progress and also for the development of the students themselves. This paradigm is in accordance with KH Dewantara's educational philosophy of *ing madya mangun karsa*, which means that teachers are with the students to guide progress (Suparlan, 2015).

### Third, Motivating

A teacher has an important role as a figure who provides encouragement or motivation that affects student involvement in the learning process. The presence of a teacher is one of the external factors that influence a student's interest in learning (Intarti, 2016). Students learning motivation will grow well if teachers teach pleasantly, such as being friendly, paying attention to all students, and always helping students who have learning difficulties. In short, learning motivation will grow well if teachers have adequate competence in enhancing the students' engagement.

In relation to the role of motivator, shepherd teachers place themselves behind students to encourage, pay attention, and help them. The Father of Indonesian Education, K. H. Dewantara, says that a teacher must be able to "*tut*

*wuri handayani*," which means from behind, a teacher must be able to provide encouragement and direction to students (Suparlan, 2015). The presence of the teacher as a shepherd who faithfully stands behind the students will help them to move forward in the experience of disorienting dilemmas. Mezirow (2018) asserts that the learning process often brings an experience of confusion for a student. This situation will be very confusing, disturbing, and discouraging. In this student struggle, a teacher needs to be present to motivate the student to move forward and process.

#### Fourth, Setting an Example

The teacher in Indonesian is "Guru," which is absorbed from Sanskrit. This term gives rise to the philosophy (especially in Javanese society) that a teacher is obeyed and imitated. Again, quoting Dewantara, a teacher has the role of *ing ngarsa sung tuladha* (in front, an educator must provide an example in the form of good actions for students) (Suparlan, 2015). Teachers play a crucial role, acting as models of living according to God's word, so they influence students through example and teaching (Zendrato, 2025, pp. 180–199).

The calling as a shepherd requires a Christian teacher to be at the forefront of living out spiritual values. In addition to being a professional figure in carrying out his profession, a teacher must be able to become a role model for students (Linhart, 2016). This idea is in accordance with the famous Latin saying *verba movent, exempla trahunt* (words move but examples captivate) - Actions speak louder than words. The life of an exemplary teacher will become a hidden curriculum for students (Alsubaie, 2015). With this experience, the learning process is not only focused on the content that the teacher explains in class, but the students will learn how to live the content in real life. A teacher's life example is the most effective form of education.

#### *The Quality of the Teacher as a Shepherd*

Reflecting on the biblical image of a shepherd, the metaphor of a teacher as a shepherd also demands certain qualities that a shepherd must possess. This section discusses the qualities of a shepherd teacher as an agent of transformation for his learners. Some of the qualities that must be included are loving the soul of each flock, knowing the flock, and serving the flock.

A shepherd teacher must have a heart of love for souls. This quality deserves to be placed at the top of this list. Love for souls is the underlying value of all other values. A teacher with a shepherd philosophy is not only tempted to do administrative tasks but more than that. This calling is related to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20). With a heart that loves the soul, a teacher will be able to understand the Lord Jesus' parable of a sheep lost from the flock (Lk 15:4-7, Mt 18:12-14). Out of love for the soul, a shepherd will not let one sheep go astray and be pounced upon by wild animals, thinking that there are still 99 sheep left. The shepherding teacher's heart will see that loving and saving one lost soul is a must.

On a practical level, the Lord Jesus provided ample opportunities for sinners and marginalized people to learn from Him. At that time, what Jesus did was an unusual custom for a Rabbi to teach teaching to just anyone. Jesus' soul-loving heart motivated him to be inclusive of women, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, and sinners with the love of a shepherd. The orientation to the soul makes the Lord Jesus open himself and his teaching to be accessible to anyone so that no one will be excluded in the process of encountering the truth.

A teacher who loves souls will be an important foundation for inclusive and hospitable learning. This learning model will certainly encourage and facilitate the creation of transformative experiences for students. In the learning process, there may also be students who become "troublemakers" in the classroom. Some students have low interest in learning or bad behavior. There may also be unwilling students who show symptoms of Siberian Syndrome by refusing to engage in the learning process. A shepherd teacher will try to counteract these students and try not to judge and exclude them from the learning process. The teacher needs to give "space" for the students to fail and try because, with this experience, the students will experience meaningful learning. The unfailing love of the shepherd teachers will hopefully touch the "lost students" so that in the process of life, they transform.

Furthermore, a shepherd must know his sheep. The Lord Jesus in John 10:3, 14, 27 describes a good shepherd as knowing his sheep. In fact, a good shepherd knows each sheep by name and personally calls each one by name. It explains the dimension of the interpersonal relationship that exists between the shepherd and the sheep. The relationship between the two is not only limited to teachers and students but more than that, there is an emotional bond that is

established. If a shepherd knows the sheep personally by name, then there is a deep interpersonal relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. Psychologically, the sheep feel a strong inner bond with the shepherd.

As a shepherd, the teacher must view students not just as an anonymous mass nor as human resources but as individuals who must be addressed personally. Therefore, teachers must get to know their students one by one. They must understand their strengths, anxieties, joys, hopes, or dreams, and sorrows. On the other hand, for students, a teacher is not an unknown teacher and educator but a person who is well known. If the teacher knows the students one by one, and vice versa, then there will be a deep relationship with a strong emotional bond between them. It is important because, psychologically, a deep connection with strong emotional closeness between teachers and their students is an absolute requirement for the implementation of a conducive and transformative learning atmosphere.

Finally, a shepherd teacher must be present as a servant. The Lord Jesus, who was the good shepherd (Jn 10:7-16), modeled humility and servanthood. He called Himself teacher and Lord, but at other times, He served His disciples. Even as a good shepherd, He was willing to lay down His life for His flock (Jn 10:12). This was not just the rhetoric of the Great Teacher. Still, it was proven by His service and sacrifice (Mrk 10:45). As a senior shepherd, Peter received the shepherding mandate from the Lord Jesus directly; a shepherd must carry out his calling with full devotion and not only seek his benefit (1 Pet 5:2-4).

The quality of a serving person needs to be attached to the figure of a teacher as a shepherd. A teacher must be present for the students and ready to provide support and help for the students when they need help. A shepherd teacher must be available for the students. A shepherd teacher must be willing to give more time and energy. Sometimes, they are even ready to meet outside of class and scheduled learning hours. When students know that the teacher is prepared to help, they will be confident to try and explore the learning experience. In accordance with Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura points out the importance of a supportive learning environment for student self-actualization and self-efficacy. This experience will be valuable for students to support them in developing and experiencing transformative experiences. These are the recommendations for further research. The strength of the research that can be developed further that is exploring how Christian teachers understand

and apply the shepherd metaphor in actual Indonesian classroom settings. Qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations can help assess its practical relevance and transformative impact. The limitation of the study is the lack of empirical data. The findings are conceptual and philosophical rather than based on field research or interviews. The suggestion is applying the quantitative or mixed-methods research to test the effectiveness of metaphor implementation in classroom settings. It could be cross-cultural comparative study of teacher metaphors.

The summary of key findings is confirming the need of philosophical clarity for Christian teachers to increase their vocation to content delivery and the formative and moral dimensions of teaching. Besides that, the transformative role of a teacher is underscored, it requires deep reflection and the ability to guide students through a change in perspective. The shepherd metaphor shows to be a powerful and integrative model, aligning theology, pedagogy, and ethics. The metaphor shapes teacher's identity and action in education. It also integrates the dimension of cognitive and spirituality by Holy Spirit in describing transformation.

The relationship of the findings with the previous research is the use of the metaphor which represents Indonesian cultural context that is shepherd. The earlier studies (Lakoff, 2008; Saban, 2006) explored a wide variety of metaphors, such as teachers as sponges, technicians, or guides. The shepherd metaphor helps people to understand the role of Christian teacher in Indonesian context.

The strength of the paper is the originality. It introduces the unique metaphor of the teacher as a shepherd in the Indonesian Christian education context. It also combines insights from philosophy, theology, cognitive science, and education. Further, it addresses both cultural familiarity (agrarian society) and biblical imagery, making the metaphor more applicable to local Christian teachers. It is supported by some educational theories (transformative learning, moral philosophy, metaphor theory).

The limitation of the study is the narrative approach which lacks the empirical data. The findings are conceptual and philosophical rather than based on field research or interviews. The metaphor may not resonate as deeply in non-agrarian or non-Indonesian settings due to the limiting generalizability. The metaphor is needed to translate into specific teaching strategies, training modules, or curricular practices.

There are some implications. The first is teacher training programs must integrate philosophical and theological foundations. The second is the shepherd metaphor encourages Christian teachers' spiritual self-awareness, ethical commitment, and pastoral care. The third is the educational practices and materials can be shaped to reflect the caring, guiding, and transformational nature of shepherding. The last is biblical theology and spiritual calling should be the foundation for Christian education.

There are some recommendations. Firstly, training modules on the shepherd metaphor can be developed to help Christian teachers to internalize their identity and calling. Secondly, empirical research to explore how teachers perceive and apply in the classroom settings can be conducted. Thirdly, applying and testing the metaphor in other regions or faith-based educational systems will broaden the contextual studies. Fourthly, encouraging teachers to engage in philosophical and theological reflection regularly as part of their professional development. The last is translating the metaphor into specific pedagogical methods (e.g., nurturing, guiding, protecting) and assessment criteria for Christian educators.

## **Conclusion**

The philosophy of education is an important driving factor in the life of a teacher in internalizing his role and vocation. By the purpose of this paper, the metaphor of the teacher as a shepherd can be a proposal for the philosophical foundation of a Christian Teacher in presenting transformative experiences for students. The socio-cultural context of the Bible matches the Indonesian context as an agrarian society. In this situation, livestock is an integral part of all aspects of community life. The relationship between a shepherd and his flock can be well appreciated. Just as a shepherd is present and responsible for his flock, a teacher has a similar role, calling, and quality to care for, direct, protect, and ensure the life of each individual under his supervision. The teacher has a noble calling and duty, where his presence has a stake in the transformative experience of every student.

This is the research finding summary. The first, it develops the teacher-as-shepherd metaphor as a philosophical foundation that emphasized care, guidance, protection, and spiritual leadership. The second, the shepherd metaphor enriches Christian education by emphasizing the teacher's vocational

responsibility that is nurturing holistic transformation in students. The third, the biblical motif of the shepherd (e.g., in the Psalms, the Gospels, and prophetic literature) offers a rich theological basis for the metaphor. The fourth is outlining key teacher qualities such as spiritual maturity, moral integrity, relational wisdom, and transformative intent.

These findings underscore the urgent need for Christian educators to move beyond a mechanical or purely cognitive understanding of their role. The shepherd metaphor challenges teachers to embrace a vocational identity grounded in philosophical reflection, biblical theology, and transformative learning theory. It provides a conceptual tool to reframe Christian teaching as a spiritual, ethical, and relational act that nurtures the whole person – mind, heart, and spirit.

This research makes a distinct and meaningful contribution to the field of Christian education by offering a contextually rooted, biblically grounded, and philosophically coherent metaphor—the teacher as a shepherd. It bridges theology, philosophy, and pedagogy, providing Christian educators in Indonesia and beyond with a robust framework for shaping identity, guiding practice, and pursuing transformative educational outcomes. This metaphor revitalizes the spiritual calling of teachers and invites a more holistic, compassionate, and purposeful approach to education.

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