

# Interfaith Communication

## Muslim-Christian Social Interaction in Sindang Jaya, Ciranjang, Cianjur

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**Abstract**—West Java is a province whose level of religious intolerance is still high. But different sights are found in the village of Sindang Jaya, Ciranjang, Cianjur. The people of this village, despite having a significant population of Christians, there has never been any friction or religious social conflict. The study aims to describe the religious life of the people of this village, the socio-religious interaction between them, the factors caused it and its implications. This research was conducted with qualitative approach supported by quantitative data or known as mixed method. This study found that the religious life of this village is, generally, harmonious and tolerance. They practiced inclusive, tolerance and humanistic theology. Only small amount of them who still adhere intolerance theology. Social-religious interaction between Muslims and Christians in this village is quite intensive. Factors that influences it include historical, theological, sociological and political. The study also found that sociological and political factors are the dominance ones. This study implies that maintaining harmonious interfaith communication need multi methods and multi disciplined approach.

**Keywords**— *Christian; Indonesia; Islam; Tolerance*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is like a double-edged sword. On the one hand it can be a source of tolerance, harmony and peace but on the other hand it can also be a trigger of conflict, hostility and violence. Among scholars who acknowledged this potential of religion are: Wilfred Cantwell Smith [1], Alfred North Whitehead [2], Charles Kimball [3], Din Syamsuddin [4], and Komarudin Hidayat [5]. Although nationally tolerance and harmony of religious life is quite good, West Java is a province whose achievements are still not proud. The act of sealing, destruction or obstruction of the construction of houses of worship is still common. According to data released by Wahid Institute in 2015 [6], West Java province is the province that still holds the highest ranking in terms of intolerance. The province at the top of the list, out of the 18 provinces monitored by the institute, is West Java with 55 cases of intolerance and violations of religious freedom, the report says. [7] Based on a national survey of religious harmony conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2015, West Java scored 72.6, meaning it is below the national average score of 75.36. [8] But different sights are found in the village of Sindang Jaya, District Ciranjang Cianjur. In the community of Sindang Jaya Village, Ciranjang District, there has never been any religious friction or religious conflict.

Sindang Jaya, is a small village located in the hilly area, 15 kilometers north of Cianjur City. The distance between this village and the city of Bandung, West Java Province Capital is 60 kilometers. The life of the people of this village is generally guided by the Sundanese cultural values system and Islamic religious values which are passed down from generation to generation and practiced in everyday life. Therefore, religious harmony in the village is feasible or has the potential to be one of the models of tolerance and harmony in the plurality of religious life in Indonesia.

This study aims to describe: (1) socio-religious living conditions of society. (2) socio-religious interaction of the community. (3) supporting factors behind the social interaction between Muslim and Christian communities in this village.

This study is based on assumption that tolerance and harmony in religious life can not be separated from religious views, the intensity of religious social interaction, and other factors supported it. Interaction or dialogue between religious people can take place in various forms, namely, the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange and the spiritual dialogue or the dialogue of religious experience. [9].

The dialogue of life is the simplest form of interfaith meeting. The dialogue of life is a dialogue, in which religious followers try to be open to each other in the neighborhood, they share pleasure and sadness, share their problems and luck. They strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joy and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

The social work dialogue is a continuation of the dialogue of life and has led to forms of cooperation motivated by religious consciousness. They collaborate in various areas of social activity regardless of their respective religious identities. The sociological basis is the recognition of the plurality of religions so as to create a trust society. [10]. This dialogue is also called a dialogue of action because religious followers work together to progress together and free human beings from various backwardness. Persons of all religions collaborate for the integral development and liberation.

Theological dialogue is intended to build a more genuine interfaith relationship. Theological dialogue aims to build an awareness that beyond our beliefs so far, there are many beliefs from the traditions of religions other than us. The question to be answered through theological dialogue is how we position

our faith in the midst of the faith of others. This dialogue is undertaken to seek a deeper understanding of their religious heritage and at the same time to cultivate an appreciation of their respective religious values or to deepen their understanding of their respective spiritual values.

Spiritual dialogue is a dialogue that moves in the esoteric aspect, the "inner side" of the perennial religions. This dialogue aims to enrich the inner experience so that we are more and more convinced that all true religions must be good and right. This dialogue is called dialog of religious experience because the persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

From these various forms of dialogue and religious interaction, it can be seen how the shape and level of dialogue and how the pattern of religious interaction that occurred in the community of Sindang Jaya village.

Religious social interaction is called inclusive if each believer is willing to accept the possibility of truth and safety on the other. In his writings, *Religious Pluralism and Islam*, John Hick [11] says that inclusivism is the belief that, on the one hand, salvation for anyone depends solely on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but on the other hand that this salvation is available not only to Christians but in principle to all human beings. Thus non-Christians can be included within the sphere of Christian salvation. In other words, the religious view is called inclusive if it still gives the possibility of truth and salvation to the adherents of the religion outside of the group. On the contrary, religious views are called exclusively if they only recognize the truth and salvation of their own group.

According to the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance [12], a person or group of people is called tolerant when he or she has the following attitudes or views: a) allowing others to freely hold different religious beliefs, b) allowing others to freely change their religion, or denomination or beliefs c) allowing children to hold religious beliefs that are different from their parents to a degree that depends on their age, d) allowing others to practice their religious faith, within reasonable limits, e) refusing to discriminate in employment, accommodation etc. on religious grounds f) accepting that followers of various religions consider their own beliefs to be true g) Making a reasonable effort to accommodate other people's religious needs.

Conversely, a person is called an intolerant according to the Wahid Foundation if he has attitudes and actions aimed at blocking, opposing or denying the civic rights of citizens guaranteed by the constitution, raised in the name of religion. Such as the denial of the rights of non-Muslims, the denials of the rights of groups most disliked despite same religious background.

Inclusive and tolerant religious social interactions tend to be humanist. While exclusive, intolerance religious social interaction tends to be authoritarian. Authoritarianism, in the words of Khaled Abou El-Fadl [13] is the act of "locking" or captivating the Will of the Divine, or the will of the text, into a

specific determination, and then presenting this determination as inevitable, final, and conclusive."

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The design used in this study is a qualitative research design that uses quantitative data. Therefore this research is similar to what John W. Creswell [14] calls a mixed method. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, observations and documentation studies. Quantitative data collected by questionnaire is addressed to a number of respondents / informants who are determined purposively and proportionally by considering the religious, age and gender aspects. Time span to disseminate and collect questionnaires between July and August 2016. The 30-person questionnaire consisted of 15 Muslims and 15 Christians, 21 men and 9 women, 19 over the age of 40 and 11 aged below 40. The oldest informant was 78 years old, and the youngest informant was 17 years old. Some informants became the object of questionnaires and interviews as well. Therefore, data from interviews and questionnaires can be used to check each other. Checking is possible because every informant is asked to write his name and religion. Data from interviews, questionnaires, observations and documentation studies are examined and analyzed to see the forms of dialogue or interaction between Muslims and Christians, the intensity of interaction, the model of interaction and the factors behind it.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Socio Religious Life of Sindang Jaya Village

Sindang Jaya, is a small village located approximately 19 kilometers from the city of Cianjur, and is about 60 km to Bandung, the capital of West Java province. The potential of the area owned by this village is agriculture. The majority of the people or about 23 percent are living as farmers who are still traditional. The rest, there are civil servants, traders and others.

The population of Sindang Jaya village is 7132 people with the composition of 3570 men and 3562 women. Religion and ethnicity in this village are heterogeneous. Viewed in terms of ethnicity, the number of Sundanese ethnic there are 6309 people, 130 ethnic Javanese, Madurese 4 people, 10 people Ambon ethnic. The majority of them are Muslims, while Christians occupy the second majority, amounting to 1464 or about 20 percent. In this village there are 6 facilities of church houses that are located close enough to several mosques. Sindang Jaya village has 23 mosques, 9 of which are used as jami mosque to hold the Friday prayers.

The life of the people of Sindang Jaya Village is generally guided by the Sundanese cultural values system and Islamic religious values which are practiced in everyday life. The presence of Christians in this village can be traced back to 1903. They are from Cikembar south of Banten that is close to Sukabumi. The number at first came was 66 people including 40-day-old baby. They moved voluntarily, because at the time in Cikembar, although there is fertile land they have trouble in doing religious activities, religious activities are restricted.

In accordance with the development of the village, the population of the Christian population is also growing. The village of Sindang Jaya is the most Christian village. Here there are six church buildings, four of which belong to the old church, the fifth church is new. The sixth church is still in the process of development. Although it can be used, formally there is no permission from the government. All the churches here are basically one stream so there is not much difference. Small differences do exist, such as in liturgy but overall they work well together.

In this village there is an Inter-Church Cooperation Agency. (BKSAG). In addition to BKSAG, Sindang Jaya village also established the *Majlis Gereja* (MG), which is in line with the village level MUI (*Majlis Ulama Indonesia*). Currently MUI Sindang Jaya village led by KH Zaenal Arifin, while MG led by LM Acustiman.

As a socially religiously-affiliated society to the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) organization, people in this village maintain a tradition of *tahlilan*, *muludan*, *rajaban* or other religious traditions commonly practiced by NU residents. Only a small part, especially those affiliated with the PERSIS (*Persatuan Islam*) organization who are unfamiliar with such a tradition. Nevertheless, when there is an activity of *tahlilan* that is very close to their home, they also participate.

As a base for NU, there are also some *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in this village, one of which is Al-Musri *pesantren* with its students almost a thousand people. Concerning political affiliation, the people of Sindang Jaya village are diverse. Among those who received significant votes were PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*), PDIP (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*) and Golkar Party (*Golongan Karya*). KH Zainal Arifin, who became chairman of MUI Sindang Jaya village is a NU figure.

The moderate atmosphere of religious life, loyal to a legitimate government, tolerant of religious differences and tolerance to local traditions make this village a target of attacks by hardline Islamic groups. In history, this village is almost attacked by the *Darul Islam* (DI) and the Islamic Armed Forces of Indonesia (TII). They have reached the nearest village called Calincing. They set fire to this village and there have been two victims who died. Fortunately, they were confronted by the TNI (Indonesian National Army) so that the two armed groups met and resulted in many victims among DI / TII.

#### B. Socio-Religious Interaction between Muslims and Christians in Sindang Jaya Village

The religious social interaction between Muslims and Christians in this village is generally good, the intensity is also quite high. Various forms of interaction take place in this village. In this village there is a dialogue of life, social dialogue, theological and spiritual dialogue.

In this village, Muslim and Christian followers meet each other in everyday life. They mingle in normal social activities. They collaborate in various areas of social activity regardless of their respective religious identities. They can serve each other or help each other, regardless of their religion. Herawan who is Christian, for example, has an

employee or tenant of rice field (*penyawah*) who are Muslims. He himself is the village secretary of the village head who is Muslim.

According to Sajarah Nafi, the current head of Sindang Jaya village, Muslims and Christians in this village visit each other, send food if there is a celebration of the feast day, both Muslim festivals and Christian festivals. The sense of brotherhood was especially emerging during the disaster. Whether the affected person is a Muslim or a Christian. If there is a disaster, suppose someone dies, they not only come to the house, but sometimes to the grave. The blending of churches with Muslim settlements is also not a problem, as is the Muslim settlement behind the *Kerasulan Pusaka* Christian church. A few meters from this Church, there is *Al-Husaini* Mosque, and if walking a little more from al-Husaini mosque can also be found Eliezer church.

The people who live in this village, have been used to witnessing the activities of worship of Muslims on Fridays or Christian worship activities on Sundays. In this village, outsiders may find it difficult to distinguish between Muslims and Christians, because in terms of everyday language, Christians are also fluent or accustomed to utter the words commonly used by Muslims such as utterance, *Alhamdulillah*, *Insy'a'allah*.. One of the unique traditions of Christians in the village of Sindang Jaya is that they, besides, celebrate Christmas and New Year, also organize regular alms of earth (*sedekah bumi*) every year, as well as ceremonies that usually invite not only Christians, but also inviting Muslims including the board of DKM (Council of Mosque Prosperity).

Interaction in the form of social work also runs in this village. Even a number of awards are obtained by this village, among them is the third winner of the provincial level in terms of mutual cooperation. In the village race at Cianjur district, Sindang Jaya village won second place. A Christian informant describes his intimacy with his members in a largely Muslim soccer team, to the extent that he receives many food deliveries (*rantang*) from Muslims. He also recounted how the youths in this village, regardless of their religious background, volunteered to work together to help him as he made improvements to his home. In fact, there are also Christians who participate in a voluntary take a stone for the construction of madrassas or Islamic educational institutions. Muslims in this village have become drivers for their Christian master as well as Christians, some are coolies for their Muslim masters.

Theological interaction also occurs in this village. A Christian informant, for example, tells how he must find a place hidden in one room when he wants to smoke in the month of fasting. He did not dare to smoke in the open area because of respect for Muslims who are fasting. Theological social interaction occurs in a number of couples who fall in love and then married even though it comes from a different religion. This kind of marriage occurs several times in the village of Sindang Jaya. The solution, usually one of them converts, Muslims convert to Christianity or vice versa. The rules that Christians make in this village, if a Christian is married to a Muslim, he must come along, then make a statement out of the church. Then the church removes the person from his membership. The church does not distinguish



whether the Christian is female or male. According to Herawan whose sister-in-law herself became a convert (converted to Muslim), the number of Christians converted, more than the other way around. Those who convert are not excommunicated or criticized because it is the right of their choice. In a "mixed" family when there is a *Lebaran* celebration that Christians come to Muslim places, on the contrary if Christmas, the Muslims come to the place of their Christian family.

As for spiritual dialogue, it seems that only a few people can do, including Herawan. With his inner or spiritual experience, Herawan came to the conclusion that all religions are basically good, depending only on the person. Because ethically many things are the same, such as prohibiting adultery, stealing, and interfere with the wife or husband of others and so forth. Therefore, the Church never restricts or limits people who are willing to marry other believers or who want to convert. Concerning the life in the hereafter, man basically does not know whether in the hereafter he will be a resident of heaven or hell. In line with what Herawan said, Ruchman, a Christian says since a long ago, between Muslims and Christians, never argued about their own claims as "heavenly owners". In the Ruchman family itself there are Muslims, but each visit each other, especially if there is a celebration or on holidays. As long as each cares for each other, marriage does not become a barrier to the union of people of different faiths or religions.

According to Saefullah, MUI secretary of Sindang Jaya village, throughout his life in Sindang Jaya, the presence of the Christian community is considered unremarkable, Muslims never feel disturbed. Christians have existed since the colonial era, since the Dutch colonial era. For the old population, the interaction of Muslims and Christians is relatively no problem. They said that from the beginning, since we were little children, we play ball and others, it's normal. Nevertheless, coordination is always done if there are Muslims who want to convert to Christianity. Coordination is to ensure that the conversion occurs voluntarily without being forced. Thus, as long as it is done voluntarily, religious change is basically acceptable to each side. But if impressed there is manipulation or engineering, including engineering through marital institutions, the Muslims rather objected. The Muslim party basically wants to defend first his brother who wants to convert. For Muslims, converting to Christianity means apostasy, committing a grave sin.

Although social interaction between Muslims and Christians is generally good, it does not mean there is no problem. Among the problems is about the construction of Karis Church, the sixth church in the village of Sindang Jaya. The church is known as the Sihombing church, led by a priest named Mangapul Sihombing.

Thus church has not yet received official permit. However in deliberations attended by the sub-district head resulted an agreement that Muslims did not prevent other believers from worshipping, nor would they mind if Christians built a new church. But they only want the houses of worship to be built in accordance with the procedures set out in government regulations. They also hope that as long as the requirements are

not met, the church should not be used first for fear of provoking social jealousy.

In addition to the construction of houses of worship, the problem arising from the interaction between Muslims and Christians in this village is a mixed marriage between Muslims and Christians. According to the views of the village MUI, interfaith marriage between Muslims and Christians can not be implemented until one party has to convert. In practice, more Christians convert to Islam if they intend to marry. *Togri* local term abbreviation of *entog* and *meri* is used to call the mixed marriage which each remain on his or her religion. *Togri* is considered a problem for the MUI because, such marriages are invalid according to the MUI Sindang Jaya village.

From the description above it can be said that the intensity of dialogue among them is quite high. They have actually undertaken various forms of dialogue, from life dialogue, social action dialogue, theological dialogue to spiritual dialogue with high intensity. This is corroborated by the results of survey.

According to survey, the entire community (100%) of Sindang Jaya village, whether Muslim or Christian, is of the opinion that for every believer, every religion is true and will deliver its adherents to the path of salvation. One hundred percent of them also believe that their religion is the only true religion that will lead people to the path of salvation. Therefore, according to them, every religious people, regardless of their religion, should respect their religious beliefs and must be willing to accommodate the religious needs of others as long as the need is natural and understandable according to common sense. According to them, all religious persons who live in Indonesia, regardless of religion, should be subject to the rule of law in Indonesia.

Almost all villagers of Sindang Jaya (97%) have a view that freedom in practicing or expressing religion and beliefs should only be limited if it interferes with security, public order, health, public morals or disrupts the rights and freedoms of others. Almost all of them (97%) also do not want any discriminatory treatment in employment or service on religious grounds. Because for 93.5% of them, all religions are basically good and teach goodness. When they are asked, whether outside of their religion there is also the possibility of containing the truth and can lead to the path of salvation, 86.6% of them approve it. They (83%) also allow others to freely change their religion. They (63%) did not agree if the person who changed his or her religion was punished or excommunicated. Thus, religious social interaction that takes place in the village of Sindang Jaya can be classified as an inclusive, tolerant and humanist. Authoritarian attitudes do not appear in religious social interaction between them.

### C. Supporting Factors Behind the Social Interaction between Muslims and Christians in Sindang Jaya Village

There are many factors that contribute to religious social interaction between Muslims and Christians in this village. Among them are historical, sociological, theological and political factors.

The social interaction between Muslims and Christians in this village can not be separated from the historical roots of Islam and Christian in the village. The presence of Christians in this village can be traced back to 1903. The existence of a historical heritage such as this has made them since childhood have been accustomed to live side by side and interact with Muslim citizens. They have been accustomed to mingle and play together between those whose parents are Muslims and those whose parents are Christian.

From the sociological aspect, the people of this village still respect the traditional cultures. The traditional culture practiced in this village is not just about religious traditions but also the common traditions that, say interfaith as in the tradition of *sedekah bumi* (earth alms). Sindangjaya village community in general can be regarded as community *paguyuban* (Gemeinschaft). The pattern of the community is characterized by the personal relationships of its members, resulting in a very deep bond.

Theological factors become factors that contribute to the interaction of religious social that is relatively harmonious. When measured by the indicators contained in the concept of tolerance, Christian and Muslim communities living in the village of Sindang Jaya had met most of the indicators. Theology adopted by the people of Sindang Jaya village, in general is in line with the idea of theology of harmony written by Nurrohman Syarif [15] and the idea of Islamic Theology of Religious Pluralism written by Imtiyaz Yusuf [16].

Another factor that contributes to political support is the existence of legal umbrella and legislation agreed upon by all religious people to be obeyed, especially in cases of disputes or dissent among them.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The religious life of the people of Sindang Jaya village is a harmonious and tolerance. The socio-religious interaction between Muslims and Christians is very intensive. Interactions between them not only occur in the public domain but also occur in private areas. In this village there are all kinds of dialogue, from life dialogue, social dialogue, theological dialogue up to spiritual dialogue. Many supporting factors are behind the basis of religious social interaction between Muslims and Christians in preserving tolerance and harmony. The most important of them are sociological, political and theological factors. Sociological factors, because the community of Sindang Jaya can be classified *paguyuban* community. Political factor, because in Sindangjaya village society, there are no political views and attitudes that contradict government and state policy. They all agree and are ready to follow the rules of Indonesian legislation, including the laws governing religious life. Theological factors, because they generally have an inclusive and tolerant theological view. This study implies that efforts to maintain harmonious interfaith communication need to be conducted together by all level of society.

##### A. Authors and Affiliations

Nurrohman Syarif is a lecturer at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. Among the issues that interest him are issues

surrounding religion, law and politics. He teaches legal politics at the Faculty of Sharia and Law and in the Post Graduate Program. He also taught Islamic Education, Pluralism and Multiculturalism in the post-graduate program of Islamic University of Nusantara (UNINUS). Among the published writings are *Pesantren Response to Religious Tolerance, Pluralism and Democracy in Indonesia*, (Islamic Journal of Nusantara Islam, 2014), *Model of Tolerance and Harmony in Plurality of Religious Life*, (Al-Tsaqafa, Journal of Islamic Civilization, January 2017). Besides as a lecturer he is also listed as a board of PWNU and MUI of West Java.

##### B. Figures and Tables

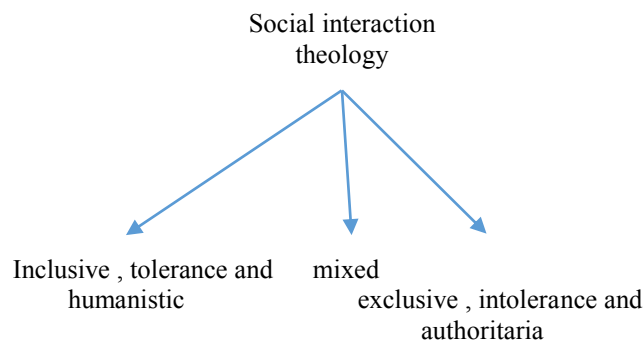


Fig. 1. The Types of Social Interaction Theology

TABLE I. THE LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND INTERACTION

Level	Names	Descriptions
1	The dialogue of life	a dialogue, in which religious followers try to be open to each other in the neighborhood, they share pleasure and sadness, share their problems and luck.
2	The dialogue of (social) action	a continuation of the dialogue of life and has led to forms of cooperation motivated by religious consciousness. They collaborate in various areas of social activity regardless of their respective religious identities.
3	The dialogue of theological exchange	to build an awareness that beyond our beliefs so far, there are many beliefs from the traditions of religions other than us. The question to be answered through this dialogue is how we position our faith in the midst of the faith of others.
4	The spiritual dialogue or the dialogue of religious experience	This dialogue aims to enrich the inner experience so that we are more and more convinced that all true religions must be good and right. This dialogue is called dialog of religious experience because the persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches.

**TABLE II. THEOLOGICAL VIEW OF SINDANG JAYA SOCIETY**

No	Statements	Agreement (...%)
1	For every believer, every religion is true and will deliver its adherents to the path of salvation	100
2	I think my religion is the only true religion and that will lead me to the path of salvation	100
3	All religions are basically good and teach goodness	93,2
4	Religion outside that I profess may also contain the truth and can lead to the path of salvation	86,6
5	Opportunities for salvation in the afterlife (heaven) for those who do not follow my religion is left entirely to God the Most Merciful	83,2
6	As long as it is based on its own will, not forced, one is basically allowed to change his or her religion	83,2
7	Those who change their religion are apostates who must be condemned, punished or excommunicated in the life of the world	29,9
8	Freedom in practicing or expressing religion and beliefs may be limited if it interferes with security, public order, health, public morals, or disrupts the rights and freedoms of others.	96,6
9	A person should not be discriminated against in employment or service simply because of religious differences	96,6
10	Anyone should be willing to accommodate the religious needs of others as long as the need is natural and understandable according to common sense.	100
11	All religious persons living in Indonesia, regardless of their religion, shall be subject to the rule of law prevailing in Indonesia	100

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