

## RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION AS A BASIS FOR INCLUSIVE RELIGIOSITY: A STUDY OF HAIDAR BAGIR AND HENRY CORBIN

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**Abstrak:** Eksklusivisme agama dalam masyarakat pluralistik Indonesia sering kali tidak berakar pada kekurangan moral, melainkan pada cakrawala epistemologis yang sempit yang mereduksi agama menjadi identitas formal dan kepatuhan doktrinal semata. Studi-studi mengenai imajinasi keagamaan, baik yang berorientasi moral-kognitif maupun simbolik-fungsional, belum secara memadai membahas status ontologis imajinasi dalam tradisi filsafat Islam. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut melalui analisis terhadap konsep imajinasi keagamaan Haidar Bagir dalam *Religion and Imagination* dengan menggunakan kerangka *mundus imaginalis* Henry Corbin, melalui pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dan hermeneutika filosofis sebagai metode utama. Analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa instrumen *qalb*, *fu'ad*, dan *dzawq* yang dikemukakan Bagir berfungsi sebagai organ persepsi imajinal yang bersifat gradual dan berkorespondensi dengan konsep *imaginatio vera* Corbin. Studi ini juga menunjukkan bahwa keberagaman inklusif merupakan konsekuensi ontologis dari perluasan kesadaran keagamaan, bukan sekadar bentuk toleransi prosedural. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menawarkan sintesis konseptual antara pemikiran spiritual Islam dan ontologi imajinal Corbin, sekaligus menghadirkan kerangka filosofis untuk memahami eksklusivisme agama dan transformasi pendidikan keagamaan dalam masyarakat pluralistik.

**Kata kunci:** Haidar Bagir, Imajinasi Religius, Kehidupan Beragama, Inklusivitas Beragama

**Abstract:** Religious exclusivism in Indonesia's pluralistic society is frequently rooted not in moral deficiency but in a narrow epistemological horizon that reduces religion to formal identity and doctrinal compliance. Existing studies on religious imagination, whether moral-cognitive or symbolic-functional in orientation have not sufficiently addressed the ontological status of imagination within the Islamic philosophical tradition. This study fills that gap by analyzing Haidar Bagir's concept of religious imagination in *Religion and Imagination* through Henry Corbin's

framework of the *mundus imaginalis*, employing a qualitative library-based approach with philosophical hermeneutics as its primary method. The analysis demonstrates that Bagir's instruments of *qalb*, *fu'ad*, and *dzawq* function as gradational organs of imaginal perception corresponding to Corbin's *imaginatio vera*, and that inclusive religiosity constitutes an ontological consequence of expanded religious consciousness rather than procedural tolerance. This study contributes a cross-tradition synthesis between 'irfani-Sunni thought and Ishraqi imaginal ontology, offering a philosophically grounded framework for addressing religious exclusivism and transforming religious education in pluralistic societies.

**Keywords:** Haidar Bagir, Religious Imagination, Religious Inclusivism, Religious Life

## A. Introduction

Religious diversity in Indonesia's pluralistic society is often caught between the richness of spiritual expression and the tendency toward identity-based exclusivism. Not infrequently, in practice, religion is reduced to nothing more than a set of formal claims to truth, symbols of social identity, or ritual compliance, resulting in the loss of its reflective and transformative dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

Such a reduction results in the intensification of polarization among religious communities as well as the weakening of ethical and humanitarian sensibilities, which are precisely the core of religious teachings themselves. This situation calls for an alternative approach to understanding religious diversity that does not stop at the normative-dogmatic realm, but is capable of touching upon the dimensions of meaning and human spiritual experience.<sup>2</sup>

This phenomenon does not stand alone. Research shows a significant correlation between religious exclusivism and religious intolerance, with exclusivism contributing 36% to the emergence of intolerant attitudes within religious communities. Even more concerning is that the most dominant indicator of exclusivism is the tendency to interpret religious texts strictly literally, with a very high percentage reaching 88.45%, followed by the view that salvation is found only in one's own religion at 83.30%. These figures demonstrate that the root of the problem does not lie in a lack of formal religious knowledge, but rather in how religion is understood and lived out. When religion is accessed solely through textual literalism and claims of exclusive salvation, it

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<sup>1</sup> Martinus Maria Join, Irenius Bernad, and Adrianus Naja, "Membongkar Egosentrisme, Eksklusivisme Dan Fiksasi Agama Dalam Ruang Publik," *Focus* 2, no. 1 (2021): 59–66, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26593/focus.v2i1.4444>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

loses its capacity to serve as a transformative force that fosters empathy and social responsibility. The inner dimension of religion, which in various traditions is actually the core of religious experience, is marginalized by an approach that is purely normative and identity-centric.<sup>3</sup>

This is where the urgency of an approach grounded in meaning and inner experience becomes relevant. In the development of contemporary religious studies, spirituality has come to be understood not as something separate from formal religion, but as the very essence of religion itself; thus, religion cannot be separated from the dimension of spirituality, which is personal, functional, and oriented toward the meaning of life.<sup>4</sup>

The separation between institutionalized formal religion and personal, existential spirituality is, in fact, one of the reasons why religious practice has lost its transformative power. Recent studies also indicate that a reflective interpretation of religious symbols has the potential to serve as a relevant medium for spiritual encounter, particularly in societies undergoing continuous social and cultural change.<sup>5</sup> It is within this context that Haidar Bagir's thoughts on religious imagination offer a significant perspective—namely, an effort to restore religion to its living dimension of meaning, so that religious practice does not stop at formal compliance or the protection of identity, but rather develops into a transformative experience that opens ethical awareness and fosters inclusivity rooted in lived experience, not merely procedural tolerance.<sup>6</sup>

Various studies have examined the relationship between imagination and religious life from a variety of perspectives. Many aspects of human life are dynamically interrelated or serve as a conduit for humans to achieve harmony between spirituality and imagination.

In his article titled *“Imagination, Religion, and Morality: An Interdisciplinary Approach,”* published in the journal *HTS Teologische Studies*, Bernice Serfontein (2019) explains that imagination plays a crucial epistemological role in the

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<sup>3</sup> Qolbi Mujahidillah Adzimat Sukmayadi, Sardin Sardin, and Nindita Fajria Utami, “Generasi Z Dalam Komunitas Keagamaan: Potensi Intoleransi Beragama Melalui Budaya Eksklusif Dalam Memahami Agama,” *Jurnal Pemikiran Sosiologi* 10, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jps.v10i1.81066>.

<sup>4</sup> Labib Marzuki Shobir, “Spiritualitas Dalam Perspektif Agama-Agama: Sebuah Pencarian Titik Temu,” *Indonesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2020): 118–30, <https://doi.org/10.33367/ijhass.v1i2.1332>.

<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel F. Barrett, “Religious Symbolism and the Experience of Life as Meaningful: Addition, Enhancement, or Both?,” *Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010088>.

<sup>6</sup> Abdulloh Hadziq and Ita Rodiah, “Agama Dan Spiritualitas Teosofi Di Indonesia: Antara Formalisme Dan Subtansialisme,” *Jurnal Kajian Islam Interdisipliner* 8, no. 2 (2023): 182–200, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jkii.v8i2.1354>.

formation of human morality and religious consciousness. Serfontein argues that human imagination, rooted in evolutionary processes and enriched through social and symbolic interactions, creates an ethical space where individuals can evaluate their actions based on experience and empathy toward others. This perspective affirms that morality and religiosity do not come from above (top-down) from divine authority, but rather develop bottom-up from the fundamental human capacity to imagine and understand existence and meaning. This approach challenges traditional views and highlights the importance of interdisciplinary understanding including evolutionary biology and theology to build an ethics that is more responsible and aligned with profound human experience.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, Handayani and Ali (2020) offer a different perspective in their article titled, *“Between Religion and Imagination: The Symbolic Identity of Worship from the Perspectives of Post-Communication, Post-Spirituality, and Hyper-Spirituality”*, published in the journal *Religios: Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya*, the authors examine how imagination shapes the symbolic identity of worship practices in the digital communication era through the lenses of post-communication and hyper-spirituality. Worship practices, which are fundamentally rooted in obedience and devotion, have been eroded by imagination and false simulations due to the influence of hyperreality and hyperspirituality. Consequently, worship has transformed into symbols and illusory images that emphasize style and social identity more than spiritual meaning and sincere devotion to God. To rediscover the true meaning of worship, we need an understanding and practice that refers to the original teachings and avoids forms of simulation and falsity.<sup>8</sup>

Both researches confirm that imagination is not merely a mediating element, but rather a mechanism that plays an active role in religious experience. However, neither study provides an answer to a more fundamental question: how can religious imagination function as an ontological force that enables access to a world of transcendent meaning while also serving as the foundation for an inclusive and tolerant form of religiosity, particularly within the context of the Islamic philosophical tradition. Although Serfontein (2019) discusses the moral

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<sup>7</sup> Bernice Serfontein, “Imagination, Religion and Morality : An Interdisciplinary Approach,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 2019, 1–8, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5350>.

<sup>8</sup> Muslih Handayani and Mukti Ali, “Antara Agama Dan Imajinasi : Identitas Simbol Ibadah Dalam Perspektif Postkomunikasi, Postspiritualitas, Dan Hiperspiritualitas,” *Religios: Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya* 7249 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.15575/rjsalb.v4i2.8592>.

and cognitive dimensions of imagination, and Handayani and Ali (2020) analyze its symbolic distortions, both studies leave insufficiently explored the ontological status of religious imagination within the framework of Islamic philosophy. This study attempts to address that gap.

Building on this gap, the author conducted this study, focusing on Haidar Bagir's ideas in his book *Religion and Imagination*, a work that proposes the concept of religious imagination as a way to understand religion in a more vivid and substantial manner. Within Bagir's framework, religion is understood not merely as a system of teachings or laws, but as an experience of meaning internalized through the power of human imagination. Religious imagination allows religious subjects to correlate texts, symbols, and spiritual experiences without getting trapped in rigid literalism or unfettered subjectivism. Here, imagination functions as a medium for revealing meaning that operates between reason and spiritual experience. This study contributes by integrating Bagir's religious imagination with Corbin's ontological framework, offering a novel analytical lens for addressing religious exclusivism in Indonesia's pluralistic context.

To situate this concept within a robust philosophical framework, this study employs Henry Corbin's theory of the *mundus imaginalis* as an analytical lens. The *mundus imaginalis*, or '*alam al-mithal*' in Islamic philosophical terminology, can be understood as an ontological dimension situated between the material realm and the realm of pure intellect—that is, a realm where symbols and religious experiences exist objectively, though not in a material sense. Through the concept of *imaginatio vera*, Corbin asserts that true imagination is not a subjective fantasy, but rather a receptive faculty that allows humans to access the reality of meaning existentially.<sup>9</sup> This framework provides an ontological and epistemological foundation for religious imagination so that religious experience is not reduced to a mere psychological construct.

Based on this search, this study formulates the following main research question: How can Haidar Bagir's concept of religious imagination, when analyzed through Henry Corbin's *mundus imaginalis* framework, address the problems of exclusivism and religious stagnation occurring in Indonesia's pluralistic society? The objective of this study is to analyze the conceptual structure of Haidar Bagir's religious imagination, interpret its implications

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Corbin and Ralph Manheim, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton Legacy Library, 1969).

through the *mundus imaginalis* perspective, and assess its relevance as a paradigm of religiosity that is reflective, dialogical, and inclusive without sacrificing spiritual depth or ethical commitment to humanity.

This study employs a qualitative library-based approach grounded in conceptual-philosophical analysis and philosophical hermeneutics. The primary source is Haidar Bagir's *Religion and Imagination*,<sup>10</sup> which is approached not merely as a descriptive religious text, but as a coherent intellectual construction situated within the broader tradition of Islamic metaphysics and Sufi epistemology. Henry Corbin's concept of the *mundus imaginalis* serves as the ontological and epistemological framework through which Bagir's notion of religious imagination is interpreted and conceptually reconstructed. To ensure conceptual precision, the analysis is supported by Corbin's major works, particularly *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*,<sup>11</sup> alongside broader scholarship on Islamic philosophy, symbolism, and hermeneutics. The validity of the analysis is maintained through the internal coherence of arguments, consistency between concepts, and systematic interpretation of the relationship between Bagir's and Corbin's philosophical frameworks.

## **B. Religious Imagination in the Thought of Haidar Bagir**

### **1. The Genealogy of the Concept: From Greek *Phantasia* to Ibn 'Arabi's Imagination**

The concept of religious imagination, as reaffirmed by Haidar Bagir, is not a new idea but is rooted in a long history of philosophical reflection. Since ancient Greece, imagination has been understood as *phantasia* that is, the faculty that enables the reappearance of objects once perceived by the senses, even when they are not actually present and which occupies a position between *aesthesis* (sensory perception) and *nous* (reason). In the medieval tradition, this concept was translated as *imaginatio* and was extensively discussed by Scholastic thinkers, although its role was often reduced to a purely sensory function. However, unlike other Scholastic thinkers, Thomas Aquinas maintained that *phantasia* is a cognitive faculty that plays a role in the process of understanding, so that imagination is not entirely separate from the realms of meaning and intellect.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Haidar Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*, ed. Azam Bahtiar (Bandung: Bentang Pustaka, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Corbin and Manheim, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*.

<sup>12</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

Unlike the development of European medieval thought, within the Islamic intellectual tradition imagination was understood in a far stronger spiritual and Sufi-oriented sense. Discussions of imagination attained a more tangible metaphysical depth, particularly in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi. Through the concept of *khayal*, Ibn 'Arabi regarded imagination not merely as a mental faculty, but as an intermediary reality possessing ontological status and serving as a path toward divine experience. In his exposition of the hierarchy of being, ranging from *aḥadiyyah* to *waḥidiyyah*, Ibn 'Arabi affirmed the existence of *'alam al-mithal*, the intermediary realm that mediates between empirical reality (*'alam al-khalq*) and transcendental reality (*'alam al-amr*), as explained in *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*.<sup>13</sup> Within this framework, imagination (*khayal*) is not understood as passive fantasy or merely a reflection of the senses, but rather as an ontological medium that enables revelation, inner vision, and mystical experience to be manifested and interpreted symbolically. Ibn 'Arabi also distinguishes between imagination that remains bound to sensory perception and imagination capable of accessing spiritual reality, such that imagination is understood to have both cognitive and spiritual functions within the structure of human knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Haidar Bagir elaborates on Ibn 'Arabi's legacy in the book *Religion and Imagination* by asserting that the meanings of the transcendent realm are first accessed through *khayal munfasil* (an imaginal realm that exists independently of human perception) that is, an imagination not directly bound to empirical reality. In order for these meanings to be communicatively present for humans, the *khayal munfasil* is then manifested through the *khayal muttasil* (imagination connected to human subjective consciousness) in the form of symbols, images, and inner experiences that can be understood. Thus, imagination is not empty fantasy, but rather a cognitive faculty that contains knowledge. Consequently, imagination serves as a bridge between metaphysical reality and human consciousness, and religious experience gains a valid ontological and epistemological foundation.<sup>15</sup>

Bagir also emphasized that knowledge gained through the imagination cannot be separated from the role of rational-discursive reason. Following the classification outlined by Ibn 'Arabi, he distinguishes between *'aql*, which

<sup>13</sup> Wahyuning Al Amin Putri, "Jiwa Manusia Dalam Pemikiran Ibn 'Arabi Perspektif Psikologi Transpersonal," *Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel* (2019), [http://digilib.uinsby.ac.id/33410/3/WahyuningAlAminPutri\\_E97215027.pdf](http://digilib.uinsby.ac.id/33410/3/WahyuningAlAminPutri_E97215027.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Raha Bistara, "Wahdah Al Wujud Ibn Arabi Dalam Imajinasi Kreatif Henry Corbin," *Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy*, 2020, 1–14, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22515/ajipp.v1i1.2344>.

<sup>15</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

functions as discursive reason, and *'Aql* (sacred reason), which functions as consciousness operating within the realm of the imaginal world.<sup>16</sup> Knowledge obtained through *'Aql* is intuitive and inner, yet it still requires verification by *'aql* to ensure it remains within the framework of rationality and the norms of sharia. The integration of these two forms of reason maintains a balance between mystical experience and intellectual responsibility. This condition, known in the Sufi tradition as *mukasyafah*, signifies the unveiling of meaning without abandoning epistemological caution. A subject capable of operating both is called *Dzu al-'Aynayn*, the owner of two eyes.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Instruments for Accessing the Imaginal World: *Qalb*, *Fu'ad*, and *Dzawq*

Bagir explains that access to the imaginal world is not automatic, but can be achieved through the spiritual-cognitive potential that humans have possessed since the beginning. He identifies three primary instruments: the *qalb* (heart), the *fu'ad*, and the *dzawq*. These three instruments are not technical devices, but rather inner capacities that can be trained and developed to perceive a reality beyond the limited and particular boundaries of the empirical world. It is precisely the limitations of empirical knowledge that tend to drive humans toward claims of exclusive truth and a rejection of truths that come from outside.

The *qalb*, or heart, is regarded as the fundamental vessel of the primary level of spiritual consciousness. Unlike the *fu'ad*, the *qalb* apprehends transcendent matters that are still general in nature and undifferentiated. It is a capacity possessed by every human being, though it is not the exclusive domain of a particular group; it simply requires practice and purification so as not to remain at the level of superficial impressions.<sup>18</sup>

In epistemological terms, the functioning of the *qalb* is both affective and cognitive: it not only receives spiritual impressions but also shapes ethical orientation, understanding (*fahm*), and faith (*iman*). In this context, the *qalb* can be understood as the foundational basis for religious experience because it enables humans to recognize the existence of meaning behind empirical reality. However, because its nature is still receptive and general, experiences at the level

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<sup>16</sup> Tayeb Bouchoir and Rachid Acim, "Journey to Union: Exploring Ibn Arabi's Nomadic Philosophy and Imaginal Spaces in Sufism," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 12, no. 2 (2023): 257–78, <https://doi.org/10.21580/tos.v12i2.17682>.

<sup>17</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

<sup>18</sup> Luqman Abdul Jabbar, "Al-Qalb, Al-Fu'ad, and Al-Nasiyah in the Qur'an (Exploring Meaning in Spiritual and Neurological Contexts)," *Khatulistiwa* 14, no. 2 (2024): 101–16, <https://doi.org/10.24260/khatulistiwa.v14i2.3176>.

of the *qalb* still require a process of *tazkiyah*, or purification, so that they do not remain at the level of superficial emotional awareness.<sup>19</sup>

Second, the *Fu'ad*. Bagir explains that the *fu'ad* represents a higher spiritual level with a more mature readiness to access the imaginal world. He refers to Surah al-Najm, verse 11, regarding the Prophet Muhammad's SAW experience of witnessing the presence of Jibril as an example of the *fu'ad* actively accessing access the imaginal realm at its most intense level. Within this framework, the *fu'ad* allows for the imaginal experience to manifest more clearly, stably, and purposefully.<sup>20</sup>

In the epistemological dimension, the *fu'ad* no longer merely produces normative understanding, as the *qalb* does, but rather produces *ma'rifah*—that is, intuitive knowledge obtained through inner vision (*kasyf*). In Islamic tradition, revelatory dreams (*ru'ya ṣadiqah*) are often understood as a mode of imaginal perception. Epistemologically, these experiences involve the operation of the *fu'ad*, which enables spiritual realities to appear in symbolic and perceptible forms within human consciousness. Such dreams therefore function not merely as subjective psychological experiences, but as mediating encounters between the imaginal realm and human awareness

As for *dzawq*, it serves as a means of recognizing and distinguishing the quality of religious meaning. In the Sufi tradition, *dzawq* itself is based on experience and is often equated with or referred to by other terms, such as *kasyf* or *mukasyafah*.<sup>21</sup> Literally, *dzawq* means “taste”; it provides the ability not only to understand meaning conceptually but also to sense the validity and depth of the experience being lived. From a Sufi perspective, *dzawq* serves as an indicator of the authenticity of imaginative experience and distinguishes genuine access to the world of meaning from mere subjective fantasy.

### 3. Religious Imagination: A Medium for Interpretation, not a Source of Doctrine

It is important to emphasize that, in Bagir's thought, the call to activate religious imagination is not intended to elevate imagination to a source of doctrine on par with the Qur'an, the Sunnah, or Sharia. Imagination serves as a

<sup>19</sup> Fadillah Maragustam, “Sumber Daya Manusia (Fitrah, Akal, Qalb, Dan Nafs) Dalam Filsafat Pendidikan Islam,” *MA'ALIM: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (2024): 160–74, <https://doi.org/10.21154/maalim.v5i1.8425>.

<sup>20</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Isnaini, Romlah Abu Bakar Askar, and Abdul Ghofur, “Hermeneutics of Hadith in the Sufi Tradition: Analysis the Concept of Hadith Interpretation Among the Sufis,” *Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal (MICJO)* 2, no. 3 (2025): 2521–31, <https://doi.org/10.62567/micjo.v2i3.807>.

hermeneutical and existential medium possessing an inner capacity to interpret and internalize normative teachings more deeply. Religion does not merely stop at formal compliance but transforms into ethical and spiritual awareness. Thus, religious imagination is responsive and reflective toward the normative sources of religion, not competitive or autonomous.<sup>22</sup>

The two examples cited by Bagir clarify how this religious imagination works. First, in the context of social empathy, the observation of social suffering may stimulate the imaginative faculty to project oneself into the lived reality of others. For example, encountering a child begging in public space can evoke an imaginative awareness of conditions such as vulnerability, marginalization, and deprivation. Through this process, imagination functions not merely as emotional projection, but as an ethical-cognitive mechanism that transforms passive sympathy into reflective moral consciousness. Social reality is therefore no longer perceived as a distant external fact, but as a humanitarian condition that calls for ethical responsibility. In this context, imagination mediates the transition from sensory perception to ethical awareness by enabling individuals to internalize the suffering of others as a meaningful human reality rather than merely an external social fact.

Second, in the context of the practice of prayer: Bagir interprets prayer not merely as a formal legal obligation, but as an expression of human nature in responding to and orienting oneself toward the Transcendent. Human nature is understood as the fundamental inclination of all creatures to submit to and relate with God, manifested through various means in accordance with their respective natures. From this perspective, the movements and rituals of prayer are experienced as an articulation of the awareness of existence in the presence of God, shifting the understanding from mere legal compliance toward an existential appreciation of the human relationship with God as part of a broader cosmic order.<sup>23</sup>

### **C. An Analysis of the *Mundus imaginalis* in Haidar Bagir's Religious Imagination**

#### **1. *Mundus imaginalis*: Corbin's Ontological Framework**

Henry Corbin developed the concept of *mundus imaginalis* to address both a linguistic and ontological problem in translating the Arabic term '*alam al-mithal*

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<sup>22</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

into European languages. He rejected translations such as “imaginary world” because, in modern usage, the term “imaginary” tends to imply something unreal or fictitious. In the metaphysical traditions of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi, however, *‘alam al-mithal* denotes a genuinely existing mode of reality situated between the material and purely intellectual worlds.<sup>24</sup>

Corbin therefore proposes a hierarchical ontology consisting of three levels of reality: *‘alam al-mulk* (the sensory realm), *‘alam al-mithal* or *mundus imaginalis* (the imaginal realm), and *‘alam al-jabarut* (the realm of pure intellect).<sup>25</sup> Each realm corresponds to a distinct faculty of knowledge—respectively the senses, imagination, and intellect—thereby challenging epistemological reductionism, which recognizes only empirical perception and abstract rationality as legitimate modes of knowing. Unlike the sensory world, the imaginal realm can only be accessed through *imaginatio vera*, a faculty of spiritual perception through which mystical experiences, prophetic visions, and symbolic religious meanings become intelligible.<sup>26</sup> These three layers of reality correspond to three faculties of knowledge: the senses, the imagination, and the intellect—a framework that rejects epistemological reductionism, which recognizes only the empirical world and the abstract-rational world as the sole legitimate domains of knowledge.

A central illustration of this imaginal ontology appears in Suhrawardi al-Maqtul’s concept of *Na Kojā Abad* “the land of nowhere”, described as the “eighth land” beyond ordinary geographical space.<sup>27</sup> Corbin emphasizes that Suhrawardi deliberately employed a Persian expression to distinguish this realm from the modern notion of utopia or imaginary fiction. The imaginal world, therefore, is not understood as a subjective fantasy or mental abstraction, but as an autonomous and objective mode of reality with its own ontological status.<sup>28</sup>

This interpretation is further developed by Angela Voss (1986), who describes the *mundus imaginalis* as an intermediate realm possessing an objective yet non-material mode of existence. Its forms are experientially real and internally coherent for the perceiving subject, even though they are not

<sup>24</sup> Corbin and Manheim, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*.

<sup>25</sup> Ali Shariat, “Henry Corbin and the Imaginal: A Look at the Concept and Function of the Creative Imagination in Iranian Philosophy,” *Diogenes* 39, no. 156 (1991): 83–114.

<sup>26</sup> Ali Qadir, “Doors to the Imaginal: Implications of Sunni Islam’s Persecution of the Ahmadi ‘Heresy,’” *Religions* 9, no. 4 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9040091>.

<sup>27</sup> Faranak Mirjalili, “Mundus Imaginalis and the Arrival at Na-Koja- Abad in the Work of Henry Corbin,” n.d., 1–14.

<sup>28</sup> Corbin and Manheim, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*.

dependent upon material substance.<sup>29</sup> A similar position is articulated by Marta Ples-Beben (2022), who argues that the imaginal realm should not be reduced to fantasy or subjective projection, but understood as a liminal domain through which symbolic and spiritual realities become perceptible to human consciousness. In this sense, imagination functions not merely as a psychological activity, but as a mode of knowledge capable of mediating between sensory experience and transcendent meaning. Access to this realm is enabled neither by the senses nor by pure intellect alone, but by an active imagination that transforms inner spiritual states into symbolic and visionary forms.<sup>30</sup>

This framework is relevant as an analytical tool because it offers appropriate categories to distinguish between imagination in Haidar Bagir's transformative-spiritual sense and imagination in the everyday sense, which is purely reproductive. Furthermore, the concept of *barzakh* inherent in the function of '*alam al-mithal*' opens up space to analyze how Haidar understands imagination as a bridge between sensory experience and transcendent meaning—a mediating function that, in the Sufi tradition, is directly related to the practice of *ta'wil* and the capacity for *dzawq* as spiritual discernment.

## 2. Religious Imagination within the Framework of the *Mundus imaginalis*

With this ontological foundation, Haidar Bagir's religious imagination can be understood more fully. Bagir's critique of religious practices that reduce religion to a system of rules and symbols of identity finds its philosophical grounding within Corbin's framework. Such reduction occurs because religious consciousness is confined to the level of '*alam al-mulk*', which can only perceive religion as a material and social phenomenon, without the capacity to access the deeper layers of meaning in '*alam al-mithal*'. As revealed by Marta Ples-Beben (2022) and C.G. Jung (2009), imagination in this context plays an active role in acquiring cognitive knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Religious imagination, within this framework, is the ability to transcend the first level and enter the second.

The three instruments formulated by Bagir namely, *qalb*, *fu'ad*, and *dzawq*, can be understood within Corbin's framework as a gradation of the organs of imaginal perception. *Qalb* is the most basic organ; it begins to open access to the

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<sup>29</sup> Angela Voss, "Becoming an Angel: The Mundus Imaginalis of Henry Corbin and the Platonic Path of Self-Knowledge," 1986, 1–12.

<sup>30</sup> Marta Ples-Beben, "Mundus Imaginalis. On Some Liminal Adventures of the Imagination," *Analiza i Egzystencja* 58 (2022): 5–15, <https://doi.org/10.18276/aie.2022.58-01>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

*mundus imaginalis*, though not yet with full precision. *Fu'ad* represents a more trained organ which, in Corbin's terminology, becomes a mature *imaginatio vera*: capable of perceiving imaginal reality more clearly and stably, as exemplified in prophetic experience. As for *dzawq*, it functions as the ability to distinguish between *imaginatio vera*, which accesses objective imaginal reality, and *imaginatio fantastica*, which merely produces subjective fantasy. Thus, Bagir and Corbin are complementary. Bagir emphasizes the subject and the instruments of access, while Corbin emphasizes the object and the structure of the reality being accessed.

This interrelated relevance is clearly evident in the two examples provided by Bagir in his book *Religion and Imagination*.<sup>32</sup> When viewed through Corbin's framework, the social empathy born from witnessing others' suffering is an experience in which empirical social reality functions as a "gateway" to the layers of meaning in the *mundus imaginalis*—namely, the meanings of humanity, vulnerability, and responsibility—which are present not as abstractions but as realities perceived imaginally, thereby driving concrete ethical action. Similarly, with prayer, the material movements and rituals (*'alam al-mulk*) function as a gateway to an imaginal experience of presence before the Transcendent, where prayer is experienced not as a procedure, but as genuine participation in the cosmic order.

Concept	Core function	Relation to <i>Imaginatio Vera</i>	Spiritual Implication
<b><i>Qalb</i> (heart-consciousness)</b>	Receives and reflects inner meaning	Serves as the inner space where symbols and spiritual meanings are first perceived	Opens awareness toward transcendent reality
<b><i>Fu'ad</i> (deep intuition)</b>	Intensifies inner perception and insight	Interprets symbolic experiences beyond rational understanding	Enables intuitive recognition of spiritual truth
<b><i>Dzawq</i> (spiritual taste)</b>	Direct experiential knowing	Transforms symbolic understanding into lived spiritual experience	Produces certainty through direct inner experience
<b><i>Imagination Vera</i></b>	Mediates between material	Provides the symbolic-imaginal realm through which transcendent	Connects human consciousness

<sup>32</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

	and spiritual reality	meanings accessible	become	with metaphysical reality
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### 3. Conceptual Tension: Reading Corbin in the Context of Bagir

Although the relationship between these two schools of thought is productive, an honest reading requires acknowledging a number of tensions that cannot be ignored.

First, there is a genealogical tension: Corbin developed the *mundus imaginalis* primarily through the Imamite Shi’ite tradition and Persian Ishraqi philosophy, with its distinctive imamological dimension; in this context, access to the imaginal realm is closely tied to an inner connection with the figure of the Imam as *Imam al-Nur*.<sup>33</sup> Haidar Bagir operates within a broader, *‘irfani*-Sunni tradition, with Ibn ‘Arabi as the central figure. The application of Corbin’s framework to Bagir’s thought is therefore focused on its ontological and epistemological structures—namely, the trilogy of reality, the function of *imaginatio vera*, and the non-material objectivity of the imaginal realm rather than on its specifically Shi’ite theological dimension. This distinction situates the analysis within the conceptual horizon of the predominantly Sunni Indonesian context.

Second, the issue of accessibility. Both Corbin and Bagir assert that access to the *mundus imaginalis* requires a certain inner readiness. This raises the question: is religious imagination not structurally elitist because it is relevant only to certain Sufi circles or intellectuals? Bagir anticipates this criticism by emphasizing that the *qalb* is a universal potential possessed by every human being. Empathy, a sense of awe toward sacred texts, and inner engagement in rituals are manifestations of religious imagination at the level of the *qalb* that anyone can experience.<sup>34</sup> Thus, religious imagination has varying degrees of accessibility, ranging from the most basic (everyday experiences) to the most intense (*mukasyafah*). This tension regarding elitism is not eliminated, but managed through these varying degrees.

Third, the problem of verification. If religious imagination is a faculty for perceiving objective reality, how can it be operationally distinguished from ideological projections cloaked in spiritual language? Corbin distinguishes between *imaginatio vera* and *imaginatio fantastica*, and the Sufi tradition referenced

<sup>33</sup> Daryush Shayegan, “En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques . Henry Corbin,” *History of Religions* 14, no. 4 (1975): 322–34, <https://doi.org/10.1086/462731>.

<sup>34</sup> Bagir, *Agama Dan Imajinasi: Menjelajah Kedalaman Dan Kelapangan Spiritual Islam*.

by Bagir maintains this distinction through two mechanisms: the integration of discursive *'aql* and *'Aql qudsi* as a rational-normative verification, and the guidance of tradition as an external “calibrator.” Furthermore, this study proposes that the verifiable criterion for authentic imaginal experience lies in its ethical implications. Authentic experience moves toward empathy, responsibility, and a deeper ethical awareness, not toward self-justification or indifference to injustice.

#### **D. The Relevance of Religious Imagination to Indonesia’s Pluralistic Religious Landscape**

Indonesia is a unique laboratory of religious diversity. Six religions are officially recognized, hundreds of local beliefs coexist, and diverse spiritual expressions are present within the same public sphere. However, this uniqueness does not automatically lead to harmony. The problem of religious exclusivism in Indonesia stems largely not from moral depravity, but from a narrow horizon of interpretation.<sup>35</sup> When religion is understood solely as a system of identity, as Bagir criticizes, religious differences are automatically perceived as a threat. Religious energy is directed more toward the protection of symbols and claims to truth than toward a deepening of meaning, thereby narrowing the space for dialogue and weakening the ethical dimension of religion.

Religious imagination, within the framework of the *mundus imaginalis*, offers a different way of interpreting these differences. Various religious expressions can be understood as symbolic variations that mediate access to the same transcendent reality through different languages, forms, and hermeneutical horizons. However, this does not simply lead to relativism; the imaginal realm retains an objective reality irreducible to subjective preference. What changes is the mode of interpretation through which these differences are understood: not as absolute contradictions between competing truth-claims, but as diverse theophanies (manifestations of the Transcendent), each disclosing the same Reality from different perspectives and degrees of proximity.

The second point of relevance lies in the shift from procedural tolerance toward structural empathy. Discourse on religious harmony in Indonesia has largely operated on the logic of distance, such as “let them worship as long as they don’t cause a disturbance.” This is important, but it is not enough. Religious

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<sup>35</sup> Farichatul Maftuchah, “Dialog Dan Toleransi (Sebuah Alternatif Dakwah Di Tengah Pluralitas Agama),” *Jurnal Komunika* 9, no. 1 (2015): 58–66, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24090/komunika.v9i1.830>.

imagination offers a logic of closeness in which the ability to feel the social reality of others is part of one's own horizon of meaning. When one is able to imaginatively envision what it means to live as a minority, what it means to have a place of worship rejected, or what it means to grow up in the shadow of religious stigma, the response that emerges is not merely tolerance, but active solidarity rooted in ethical-religious consciousness.

The third point of relevance concerns the pedagogical dimension. Religious education in Indonesia is generally still dominated by a normative-doctrinal approach, which involves the transfer of knowledge regarding laws, rituals, and dogma.<sup>36</sup> The paradigm of religious imagination encourages a shift from teaching about religion toward living out religion, and makes room for a more reflective dimension—namely, how sacred texts speak to concrete life experiences, how rituals shape ethical character, and how differences in belief can be approached with open curiosity. Within Corbin's framework, transformative religious education is education that cultivates *imaginatio vera* as the ability to access the meaning behind symbols, rather than merely memorizing the symbols themselves.

In the Indonesian context, this approach can increasingly be observed in the discourse on humanistic religious education, which emphasizes affective experience, self-reflection, and ethical relationality as integral dimensions of religious learning. Religion is no longer understood merely as a set of doctrines to be cognitively mastered, but as a horizon of meaning to be embodied within the concrete experiences of everyday life. Sacred texts, therefore, are approached not only at the normative level but also as sources of existential reflection; rituals are understood not merely as formal obligations but as practices of ethical character formation; and encounters with difference are directed less toward the defensive assertion of identity than toward a more open and reflective engagement with the religious experience of others.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, religious imagination within the framework of the *mundus imaginalis* is not merely a philosophically intriguing concept. It has practical implications for how we interpret religious differences, for fostering empathy across identities,

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<sup>36</sup> Raysa Rahma, Ishomuddin Ishomuddin, and Zuliana Zuliana, "The Constructivist Approach in Islamic Religious Education: A Theoretical Analysis and Pedagogical," *Sosioedukasi: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Sosial* 15, no. 2 (2026): 104–11, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36526/sosioedukasi.v15i2.7300>.

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Dicky Setiawan, Marshanda Marshanda, and Surawan Surawan, "Humanistic Religious Education: Implementing A Pedagogy of Love in The Curriculum For Indonesia's Young Generation," *Citizen: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin Indonesia* 5, no. 6 (2025): 1690–96, <https://doi.org/10.53866/jimi.v5i6.1096>.

and for designing religious education that goes beyond the transmission of dogma to foster a transformation of consciousness. In Indonesian society, which requires more than mere formal coexistence, this approach offers a deeper foundation for a truly inclusive and humanistic approach to religious diversity.

### E. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Haidar Bagir's concept of religious imagination gains a stronger philosophical foundation when interpreted through Henry Corbin's framework of the *mundus imaginalis*. Religious imagination is therefore understood not merely as symbolic or psychological activity, but as an ontological mode of perception mediating between empirical reality and transcendent meaning. Conceptually, this study contributes a synthesis between Bagir's transformative spirituality and Corbin's imaginal ontology, offering a framework for understanding inclusive religiosity as an expansion of religious consciousness rather than merely procedural tolerance.

The practical relevance of this study lies in its reinterpretation of religious exclusivism as an epistemological limitation rooted in the confinement of consciousness to the level of *'alam al-mulk*. In this context, the cultivation of *imaginatio vera* offers an alternative to the normative-doctrinal model that continues to dominate religious education in Indonesia. More broadly, this study argues that imagination functions as a legitimate epistemological and ethical faculty whose authenticity is reflected in its movement toward empathy, solidarity, and reflective engagement with religious difference.

Future research could explore the implementation of this paradigm within the context of formal religious education, as well as test its relevance in more structured interfaith dialogue, particularly within non-Islamic religious traditions that also incorporate concepts of the intermediate realm and spiritual imagination within their respective cosmologies.

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