

Sam Harrelson

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Research Profile

Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy of Religion, concentrating in Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion, at the California Institute of Integral Studies. My work develops an ecological theology of perception through the language of ecological intentionality and the Ecology of the Cross, bringing Edith Stein, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Henri Bergson, process-relational metaphysics, spiritual ecology, and place-based attention into conversation with contemporary questions of ecological crisis, artificial intelligence infrastructure, vegetal life, and the moral imagination.

Education

2024-present. Ph.D. candidate, Philosophy and Religion, Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion concentration, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA. Advisor: Elizabeth Allison. Current dissertation direction: ecological intentionality, Edith Stein, process thought, phenomenology, and the Ecology of the Cross.

2002. M.A.R., Religion and the Arts, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT. Focused on religion and literature, ancient and medieval art, and religious imagination.

2000. B.A., Religion, Wofford College, Spartanburg, SC.

Research Areas

Ecological theology and spiritual ecology; Phenomenology of nature and perception; Edith Stein, empathy, finite being, and form; Process thought and Alfred North Whitehead; Ecological intentionality and more-than-human ethics; Vegetal life, trees, attention, and plant ethics; Decolonial conservation and Gullah Geechee ecological practices; Religion, technology, artificial intelligence infrastructure, energy, and water ethics; Assyrian reliefs, displacement, museum ethics, and ancient art reception.

Publications, Public Research Papers, and Working Papers

Books

2006. Asia Has Claims Upon New England: Assyrian Reliefs at Yale. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery.

Selected Public Research Papers and Working Papers

2026. Displaced Forms: Assyrian Reliefs, Ecological Intentionality, and the Ethics of Perception.

2026. Ecological Intentionality and the Metaphysics of Living Form.

2026. Attention as Ecological Practice: AI Data Centers and the Limits of the Anthropocene.

2026. Learning to Be Addressed by Trees: Vegetal Empathy, Ecological Intentionality, and the Limits of the Human.

2026. After the Crossroads: Artificial Intelligence, Place-Based Ethics, and the Slow Work of Moral Discernment.

2026. Ecological Intentionality and the Depth of Being.

2025. Quantum-Plasma Consciousness and the Ecology of the Cross.

2025. Artificial Intelligence at the Crossroads of Science, Ethics, and Spirituality.

2025. Integral Plasma Ecology: Toward a Cosmological Theology of Energy and Relation.

2025. Convergent Intelligence: Merging Artificial Intelligence with Integral Ecology and Whitehead Schedulers.

2025. Conservation as Communion.

2025. Process Ecology of the Cross: Communion, Kenosis, and the Politics of Planetary Becoming.

2025. From Communion to Kenosis: Toward an Integral Ecology of the Cross.

2025. Wording the Between: Toward an Ecological Metaphysics of Communion through Liturgy and Language.

2024. Empathy, Embodiment, and Ecology: A Phenomenological Path to Decolonial Embodiment and Reconciliation.

2024. Decolonial Methods and Epistemologies in the Study of Gullah Geechee Ecological and Spiritual Practices.

2024. Reconstructing Relationships: Decolonial Methods and Epistemologies in the Study of Gullah Geechee Ecological and Spiritual Practices.

Creative and Public Writing

2023-2025. Poetry included in the South Carolina Poetry Collection.

2003-present. Essays and public scholarship at samharrelson.com, including ongoing work on ecology, theology, phenomenology, technology, and the Ecology of the Cross.

2026-present. Carolina Ecology, a publication of essays and ideas about ecology, attention, and perception in the Carolina Piedmont.

Conference Presentations and Invited Academic Talks

- 2026.** "History as Empathic Ecology: Edith Stein and the Creaturely Horizon of Catholic Memory." Eternity in Time: Thinking with the Church through History Conference, Christendom College, Front Royal, VA, February 21.
- 2026.** "Roots of Cruciform Consciousness: Returning to the Ground of Ecological Intentionality." Graduate Conference in Religion and Ecology, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, February 20.
- 2026.** "Ecologies of Refuge: Trees, Crosses, and the Art of Neighborliness." "And Who Is My Neighbor?" Symposium, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, February 17.
- 2025.** "Boundaries: Ecological Theology, Migration, and the Sacredness of the Non-Human." International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, June.
- 2025.** "Relational Roots and Ecological Futures: Bridging Whitehead, Cobb, and Gullah Wisdom Toward a Decolonized Ecological Civilization." Is It Too Late?: Toward an Ecological Civilization, Center for Process Studies, Pomona College, June.
- 2025.** "Ecological Intentionality: Performing Peace Beyond Human Boundaries." American Academy of Religion, Western Region, Arizona State University, March 16.
- 2025.** Presenter, Religion and Ecology Summit, Ecology, Spirituality, and Religion Program, California Institute of Integral Studies.

Teaching and Academic Experience

- 2024-present.** Doctoral researcher, California Institute of Integral Studies. Coursework and research in ecology, spirituality, religion, phenomenology, process-relational metaphysics, decolonial methodology, and integral ecology.
- 2023-2024.** Science teacher, Wilson Hall, Sumter, SC. Courses included AP Environmental Science and middle school Life Science; also advised and supported field-based environmental learning.
- 2021-2023.** Science teacher, Thomas Sumter Academy, Sumter, SC. Courses included Physical Science, AP Physics, Earth and Space Science, and related science instruction across middle and upper school levels.
- 2000s-2024.** Educator in South Carolina and North Carolina schools (Hammond School, Spartanburg Day School, Carolina Day School), with more than fifteen years of classroom experience across Life Science, Environmental Science, Physical Science, Physics, Robotics, Design Technology, and interdisciplinary humanities/science teaching.
- 2000-2003.** Curatorial assistant, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. Research and museum work connected to ancient art, Assyrian reliefs, and the religious imagination of nineteenth-century America.

Ministry, Consulting, and Public-Facing Work

- Ordained minister, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Ongoing work in preaching, teaching, ecological theology, and congregational formation.
- Founder and consultant, Sam Harrelson Consulting. Marketing, web strategy, digital communications, and organizational storytelling for nonprofits, churches, schools, and mission-driven organizations.
- Founder, MinistriesLab. Equipping faith communities for ecological futures through theology, ecology, and digital strategy.
- Founder, StudiesLab. Intentional learning project for gifted young people, designed around depth, flexibility, inquiry, and interdisciplinary formation.
- Host, Thinking Religion podcast. Conversations and reflections at the intersection of religion, culture, ecology, theology, and public life.

Service, Memberships, and Professional Affiliations

- American Academy of Religion, Western Region, presenter.
- International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture, presenter and student representative nominee.
- Center for Process Studies conference participant and presenter.
- Youth Sunday School teacher and curriculum designer, First Presbyterian Church, Spartanburg.

Selected Digital and Technical Skills

WordPress, Divi, Substack, podcast production, SEO and digital strategy, curriculum design, academic writing and editing, conference slide design, Zotero, Obsidian, Google Workspace, web analytics, nonprofit communications, and AI-assisted research workflows.