

Sam Harrelson

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Research Profile

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

Education

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

2002. M.A.R., Religion and the Arts, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT. Focus: 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; Aristotle, Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Raymond Ruyer; process thought and Alfred North Whitehead; ecological intentionality and more-than-human ethics; vegetal life and plant ethics; decolonial conservation and Gullah Geechee ecological practices; religion, artificial intelligence infrastructure, energy, and water ethics; Assyrian reliefs, displacement, museum ethics, and ancient art reception.

Publications and Research

Book

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

Comprehensive Examination Papers

2026. "[Ecological Intentionality, Creaturely Form, and The Ecology of the Cross: A Cruciform Phenomenology of Creaturely Relation.](#)" Comprehensive examination paper, California Institute of Integral Studies, August 2026. 54 pp.

Current Research Project

2026-present. "[Intimacy with Remainder: Toward Ecological Intentionality.](#)" Second comprehensive examination project bringing Stein's non-primordially into conversation with Merleau-Ponty's flesh and écart.

Selected Research Papers and Academic Essays

2026. "A Life in Act: Edith Stein and the Education of Attention."

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. "Integral Plasma Dynamics: Consciousness, Cosmology, and Terrestrial Intelligence."

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

2026-present. *Carolina Ecology*, essays and public scholarship about ecology, attention, perception, and place in the Carolina Piedmont.

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

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

Conference Presentations and Invited Academic Talks

2026. "History as Empathic Ecology: Edith Stein and the Creaturely Horizon of Catholic Memory." Presented at Eternity in Time: Thinking with the Church through History, Christendom College, Front Royal, VA, February 21.

2026. "Roots of Cruciform Consciousness: Returning to the Ground of Ecological Intentionality." Presented at the 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." Presented at the "And Who Is My Neighbor?" Symposium, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, February 17.

2025. "Re-envisioning Boundaries: Ecological Theology, Migration, and the Sacredness of the Non-Human." Presented at the 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." Accepted for Is It Too Late?: Toward an Ecological Civilization, Center for Process Studies, Pomona College, June; unable to attend.

2025. "Ecological Intentionality: Performing Peace Beyond Human Boundaries." Presented at the American Academy of Religion, Western Region, Arizona State University, March 16.

2025. Moderator, "The Power of Water in Religious Networks and Creation," Seventh Annual Religion and Ecology Summit, California Institute of Integral Studies, April 21.

Teaching and Academic Experience

2024-present. Doctoral research, California Institute of Integral Studies. Research in ecology, spirituality, religion, phenomenology, process-relational metaphysics, decolonial methodology, and integral ecology.

2023-2024. Science teacher, Wilson Hall, Sumter, SC. AP Environmental Science and middle school Life Science; advised and supported field-based environmental learning.

2021-2023. Science teacher and Dean of Students, Thomas Sumter Academy, Rembert, SC. Physical Science, AP Physics, Earth and Space Science, student support, and academic leadership.

2007. Instructor, Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC. Introduction to the Old Testament (Religion 101).

2002-2021. Additional teaching appointments at Hammond School, Spartanburg Day School, and Carolina Day School. Courses included Life Science, Environmental Science, Physical Science, Physics, Robotics, Design Technology, mathematics, religious studies, literature, and creative writing.

Museum Experience

2000-2003. Curatorial assistant, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. Research and museum work related to ancient art, Assyrian palace reliefs, and the religious imagination of nineteenth-century America.

Ministry, Consulting, and Public Scholarship

2014-present. Ordained minister, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. 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 for gifted young people through depth, flexibility, inquiry, and interdisciplinary formation.

Host, Thinking Religion podcast. Conversations and reflections at the intersections of religion, culture, ecology, theology, and public life.

Service

Youth Sunday School teacher and curriculum designer, First Presbyterian Church, Spartanburg, SC.

Board member, First Presbyterian Church Weekday School, Spartanburg, SC.

Selected Digital and Technical Skills

Zotero; Obsidian; WordPress; Divi; Substack; Google Workspace; academic writing and editing; curriculum design; conference presentation design; podcast production; SEO and digital strategy; web analytics; nonprofit communications; and digital publishing.