In an important article on “Petitionary Prayer and the Religion of Qumran,” Eileen Schuller considered the question, “What is the interplay between a strongly deterministic theology such as is generally recognized in the Scrolls and specifically petitionary prayer? That is, does ‘the religion’ of the Scrolls allow for petition, supplication, or intercession, and how is this expressed in actual petitions?”¹ As is frequently the case, Schuller cuts sharply to the core of a neglected question, in this case one at the heart of the relationship between practice and belief. Although scholars have devoted a considerable amount of attention to both theological views in the sectarian scrolls and the prayer practices attested at Qumran, there has been little examination of the interplay between the two. Schuller’s article briefly surveys the evidence, focusing especially on the Hodayot, and she notes that it is intended as “tentative and a starting point for further reflection.”² My aim here is to reconsider Schuller’s article ten years on, in the light of subsequent treatments of the topic and Schuller’s final publication of 1QH³ in 2009.

Four years prior to Schuller’s article, Israel Knohl briefly broached the topic in a provocative appendix. He states boldly, “The doctrine of predestination, which was dominant in the Qumran sect, does not allow for petitional prayer in the usual sense of the word. At most, the person who is chosen by God may ask God to deepen and complete

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¹ E. Schuller, “Petitionary Prayer and the Religion of Qumran,” in Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls (ed. J. Collins and R. Kugler; SDSSRL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 34–35 [29–45]. I would like to dedicate this article to Eileen Schuller. She is a model of the judicious scholar, and we are all in her debt for her careful editions of the Non-Canonical Psalms and Hodayot manuscripts.

² Schuller, “Petitionary Prayer,” 45.

³ H. Stegemann with E. Schuller and translation of texts by Carol Newsom, Qumran Cave 1.111: 1QHodayot with Incorporation of 1QHodayot and 4QHodayot (DJD 40; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009). Throughout, I cite references to the Hodayot according to the numbering in this edition.
the kindness which God has freely given.”

With regard to a petition in the Song of the Maskil at the end of 1QS (11:15–17), Knohl notes that “the author asks God to fulfill that which God had destined and decreed for God’s chosen one.” He similarly regards a petition in the Hodayot (1QH a 8:29–30): the petition corresponds to the things one thanks God for having already given.

Knohl notes a single “questionable” example of a petition in the War Scroll (1QM 14:16, “Rise up, rise up, O God of Gods”), which he argues is not real petition but “words of arousal and urging to God.” By contrast, he notes that almost all petitions found among the Dead Sea Scrolls are in works that are not explicitly sectarian. He acknowledges that the multiple copies of Words of the Luminaries likely indicates that these petitions were used at Qumran, in which case he suggests that “the religious norms here deviated from the strict and rigid theological principles.” As we will see, Knohl’s summary significantly underestimates the presence of petitionary prayer in sectarian texts, but there is a more basic problem: it starts with the assumption that theological statements are primary and determinative for constituting religious life.

Schuller, in her article, notes that the preponderance of prayer in explicitly sectarian works is praise rather than petition, and that this is almost certainly related to the theological framework. Nevertheless, she notes that there are petitions and references to supplication in sectarian works. In the Hodayot, she identifies five petitionary passages (1QH a 19:32–34; 4:35; 8:29–36; 22:37; 23:10) and three references to petition (1QH a 19:36–37; 17:10–11; 20:7). In the Covenant Ceremony of 1QS, she acknowledges the lack of explicit petition for forgiveness where it might be expected, but argues that the adaptation of the priestly benediction is implicit petition that God bless and curse. She also points out the presence of petition where we might least expect it in this deterministic worldview: in eschatological settings, including the blessings and curses in Rule of Blessings (1QSb) and the reference in the War Scroll to a “prayer in time of war” recited by the high priest at the final battle (1QM 15:5). This would seem to refer to a petition for victory, which is surprising given the view that victory is assured. In comparison with the greater amount of petition in non-sectarian prayers among the Dead Sea Scrolls, she concludes that the

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