



Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources

John N. Collins

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Diakonia has been a key word for over forty years in talk about church and ministry and about the church in relation to the world. The word is used today to denote ministry as service to one's fellow beings, and figures prominently in theological writings and church declarations. It underlies the frequent claims that the ordained ministry has become elitist and exclusive. In this groundbreaking study, Collins shows that the current uses of the word arose from erroneous dictionary meanings propagated since the 1930s. He surveys one thousand years of ancient Greek literature, inscriptions, and papyri to provide new insight into what early Christians meant when they wrote about *diakonia*. Collins carefully rewrites the lexicon from ancient sources for the purpose of reinterpreting the earliest Christian sources on ministry. The results will challenge theologians and ecumenists to rethink the idea of ministry, to restructure attempts at renewal of the diaconate, and to redraw the profile of "the servant church."

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