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Autore	Payer Pierre J. <1936->
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Sommario/riassunto

The later Middle Ages saw the emergence of an integral theory of human sexuality, a systematic account of its origins, role, and significance in the divine plan. Instead of simply dismissing medieval views of sex as misogynist and guilt-ridden, Pierre Payer urges a re-examination of medieval writers' understanding of sexuality within the context of their cosmological perspective. He traces the developing consensus about what was thought to be the nature, purpose, and morality of sex as conceived by writers and theologians during this period. Concentrating on the positive dimension of medieval thought on sexuality, Payer first examines views on Paradise, the Fall, and original sin and its transmission. There follows an extended discussion of marriage as the sole outlet for legitimate sexual intercourse. He then turns to the broader question of the control of sexual impulses and desires through the virtue of temperance. The book concludes with a description of the virtue of virginity, which was seen to be the apex of temperance and the ideal of Christian living. Payer has assembled a vast number of textual sources from the late medieval period, presenting to the reader a variety of opinions, their development, and underlying presuppositions.
