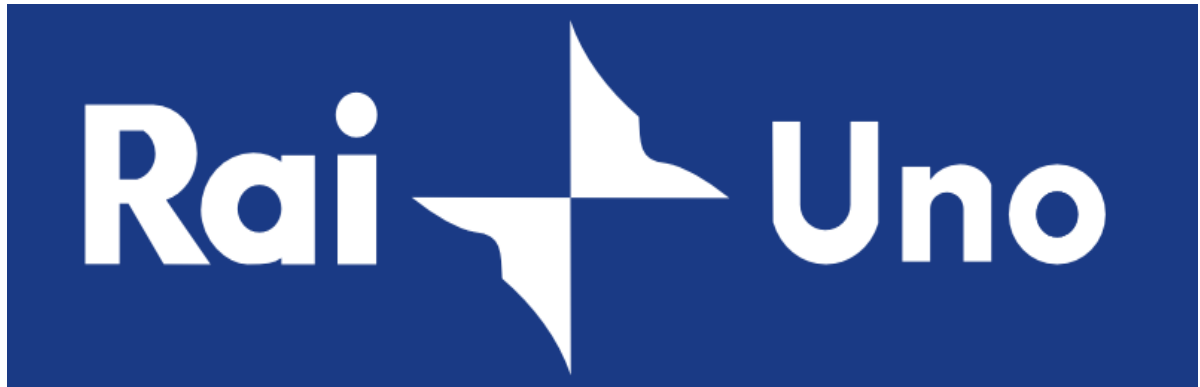


.Che Dio Ci Aiuti.



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Che Dio Ci Aiuti is an Italian prime time broadcast scripted comedy produced by the Lux Vide studio for Rai Fiction, and aired every Thursday on Rai 1, the only Italian public company that offers a public television service. The fiction, narrates the adventures of Suor Angela, a nun, who's loved by her spectators for her charismatic personality, very much as the famous American "Sister Act", and impressive investigation skills. In fact, in each episode the nun collaborates with Marco Ferrari, a detective, in the resolution of local crimes. However, what surprise are not just Suor Angela's capacities, but the fact that before becoming a nun, she was a criminal herself; a quite challenging change for Rai 1 fictions' content. But, if the first series of this fiction revolved around criminals and crime scenes, the critiques suggested a drastic change by proposing to both Rai 1 and Lux Vide to leave the already seen crime-religious drama, to embrace social and cultural issues. Undoubtedly, this change between the two seasons was extremely dangerous because Rai 1 crime fictions were the main characteristic of the channel; even so, apparently by bringing in social issues and daily life, *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* ended up being a great success, maybe becoming for the first time not just a "network product", but a cultural product reshaped to satisfy its audience.

The fiction is divided in three seasons made of 16 episodes, for a duration of 50 minutes each; the first season was aired between 2011-2012, the second from the 21th of February to the 4th of April 2013, and the third season is still in production. As all the prime time fictions on Rai 1, the first season of *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* adopted the style of crime comedy probably to follow the same path of *Don Matteo*, or *Il Commissario Montalbano*, which are known to be the greatest success of Rai 1. However, once the first season reached 7 million of viewers, Rai decided to expand its horizons so that the fiction would have become also a family fiction that could have satisfied all tastes

(TVblog). In fact, the second season presented itself as a religious comedy that aimed to convey to its viewers good values and feelings, always having that undertone of the crime fiction; at the end of both seasons Rai 1 calculated an average of 6 million 745 thousands ratings (cineconomy.com).

The idea for the fiction came from Carlotta Ercolino, a figure that worked for Rai in many productions, for example *Incantesimo*, and *Pazza Famiglia*; and the idea of the religious-crime plot came from Cecilia Cope, the senior producer of Rai Fiction Department. During a seminar she justified the presence of these crime-religious fiction aired majorly on Rai 1, by saying that “Police fiction, from the very word go for television, is the most highly-attractive genera” (Rai Fiction Department). Moreover, she continued saying that all the prime time broadcast scripted fictions, from *Il Commissario Montalbano* explicitly, to *Don Matteo*, and *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, purposefully have the typical plot of police series, of which Italian fiction was lacking; but are mainly presented as comedy or drama, therefore they will appeals to youths too. Another important point to notice about *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, and also about all the other prime time fictions of the channel, is the fact that in one night are presented two episodes back to back, so that from 50’ they cover 80’ of programming, excluding advertising. However, episodes of 80’ are not an Italian invention, but typical of Spanish telenovelas or series; for example, Rai 1 for one of its most successful family fiction used the format of the Spanish *Medico de Familia* for the Italian *Un Medico In Famiglia*. But why Rai used this technique of back to back episodes? Apparently, it is due to what is called “the programming logic”; in Italy prime time programs start around 21:15 and end at 22:30, but on commercial television they usually lasts until 23:30, so one hour more, and they are not prime time fictions anymore, but costs as such (Lucherini 36). Hence, the objective with 2 episodes for a total of 80’ is that of reducing the risk of losing

audiences both for “zapping” and the entrance in the night-time (when ratings usually decrease) in the case of 100’ episode, and that of fully use the whole prime time hour.

In addition, what is interesting about the fictions that are commissioned by Rai, is that they use the same way to appeal to viewers; comedy, drama, police drama, or religious fiction, they all have as main characters normal people with which viewers can identify or at least feel that they have something in common with them. The reason why these characteristics are found especially in *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, is because the 6th of April 2011, Rai signed an agreement with the Ministry of Economic Development through which Rai 1 committed itself into the production of valuable and profitable programs (fictions included), always respecting the values and the identity of the country, and without forgetting about the sensibility of viewers and the stewardship of minors. One of the most stressed points in the agreement is also the obligation towards a respectful and correct representation of the figure of the woman in the world, and her social and professional dignity (La Rai 13-14).

As previously stated, the program was produced by Lux Vide. Lux Vide is a major studio that produces not just Italian, but also European fictions; and that has always collaborated with Rai, especially for prime time productions such as *Don Matteo*, *Un Passo dal Cielo*, *Antonio Meucci*, and many others. The Studio born with the aim of producing TV programs with both a high artistic, and social values that appeal to all kind of audiences; and, in 2002, when Luca Bernabei became the director of all Lux Vide productions, and responsible for the idealization, and post- production department, a deal between the studio and Rai was signed. The agreements were, and still are based on the will of spreading Christian values throughout the medium of television (Lux Vide.it). A new element introduced by Bernabei in this fiction, comes from his experience of past co-productions with the United States, and is the promotion

technique of the fiction through a crossover. *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, was firstly presented during the last minutes of the last episode, of the 8th season of *Don Matteo*; another fiction with a religious-crime background. In fact, a part of being the first “Italian made” crossover, it extremely help in proposing and advertising the fiction to its audience in a very natural and attractive way, probably to bring to the fiction the same amount of viewers that followed *Don Matteo*. Furthermore, still talking about innovations, the season from 2010 to 2011 recorded an exponential growth in the production of domestic fiction for Rai 1; as Fabrizio Lucherini found out in his researches, Rai 1 increased its offers of prime time family fiction up to 30 hours more than the past season of 2009-2010 (Lucherini 8).

Furthermore, Luigi Ricci, the managing director of the marketing company Barometro declared that among all these years Rai has shown a modest innovation capacity, especially in the field of international commercialization (cineconomy.com); because a part from *Montalbano*, which is also an international blockbuster product, *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* is considered to be a local fiction, that is produced in a local office and therefore produces a local budget (ibid). In fact, being the fiction commissioned by Rai itself, it had a fixed budget of 10.250.000 €, and the revenue, like for all the other Rai programs, comes from advertising and TV license of 112 € per year that viewers have to pay in order to get the service. In addition, to talk about distribution windows for Rai 1 it is not quite possible; likewise the blockbuster issue for *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, the only place where Rai 1 offers a rerun for the fiction is on Rai HD the morning after the episode has been aired. Nonetheless, in the last two years Rai is opening up to the worldwide web, offering on Rai.Tv live streaming of 15 TV channels, and the “Replay Tv”, that gives access to the viewer to a sort of TV on demand, where it is possible to find all the programs that have been aired in the last 7 days on Rai 1 (La Rai 23).

Considering these things together, it is possible to say that yes Rai 1 offers a terribly vast choice to its viewers in terms of Italian fictions, and this is what distinguishes Rai from all the other Italian and European networks; however, editorially speaking it can also be seen as a limitation in the fiction content, because among the choices that Rai offers, the 53% is occupied by Italian fictions (Lucherini 12).

Continuing with advertising, noteworthy is the fact that it is the Rai Pubblicità company the one responsible for the general distribution of advertising, and not just for Rai, but also for Mediaset and many other channels. Taking into consideration Rai 1 and *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, advertising doesn't play a major role either in the development or in the production process of the fiction, as its budget and main features are already clearly defined by the network itself before the production starts. However, some benefits come from sponsors and promotions, an average of 56,0 million €, and from product placement from which Rai gains 1,4 million € (La Rai 60). This underlines a distinguishing point of Italian television from for example U.S television, where part of the production costs is recouped from syndication rules and advertisers, and programs are not commissioned but bought. However, there are two fictions that Lux Vide with Rai Trade managed to sell to MHZ Network; this network is a global media company that works with major worldwide studios to buy from them the closed format of top quality programs, and proposes them to the American audience, these fiction are *Montalbano*, and *Don Matteo* (MHZnetworks.org). Anyway, these international selling of Rai products is managed by the international media company of Rai Trade, which since July 2010 is the responsible for the commercialization of Rai's rights, and that aims to find economic resources a part from the two previously stated of the "Canone" and advertising (La Rai 53). For example, since from 2011 Rai decided to focus more on Italian fictions, Rai Trade and Rai Fiction co-operated in the production of some

films and agreed about the reselling of closed packaged fictions for an earnings of 73 million €, that are 2,7 million more than the season of 2009 (RaiTrade Bilancio 2010).

Going back to *Che Dio Ci Aiuti*, it is also important to look at the role that social media, newspapers and magazines in this case, played in the promotion and visibility of the program. Starting with *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, and *Liberò*, they have immediately promoted the fiction, underlying the similarity with *Don Matteo* and the funny aspect that the Thursday prime time night passes the baton from a priest to a nun. Alessandra Comazzi, writer for *La Stampa*, wrote that *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* was classic and very well done family entertainment; she pointed out the fact that nice nuns who help people in solving problems are not a modern invention, and if America had Whoopi Goldberg in *Sister Act*, Italy would have had Suor Angela. Alessandra Comazzi continues saying that “the nun of Elena Sofia Ricci is the proof that after many Popes, ‘Padri Pii’, and priests seen on Rai 1, a change finally happened and definitely worked out” (FictionItaliane.com). On the other hand, Francesco Specchia, in the daily *Liberò*, besides sustaining that the fiction is a bit “banal”, argues that the product in itself is a great concentrate of good values and positive images of good women which strongly contrasts with the “usual sexism that governs the shows’ schedule” (ibid). Lastly, Antonio Dipollina for *La Repubblica*, synthesizes the new fiction by declaring that “[Suor Angela] is the perfect alter-ego of Terence Hill (Don Matteo); and the high rating maybe comes exactly from him, viewers trusted *Don Matteo* and if *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* is presented by him, then it must be good too” (ibid).

In conclusion, instead of questioning just the success of the fiction, it is interesting to reflect on the reasons why it was successful. As the fiction was produced within a context of economic crisis, and within all the conventions that in a certain way regulated Italian fiction, it is impossible not to question those conventions and changes that

brought visibility and notoriety to it. *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* appeals to a vast audience that goes from adults, which are considered to be the habitual audience of Rai1, to youths. Also the cinematographic quality offered by the fiction looks more like the one used for miniseries or special TV events, and this is a characteristic that quite distinguishes *Che Dio Ci Aiuti* from for example *Don Matteo*, which in terms of production methods looks to be more basic. Suor Angela since the beginning of the fiction has been considered a serial character, whom success may come more than from the fiction itself, from the notoriety of her interpreter Eleana Sofia Ricci, that is an already well known figure within Italian television. Nonetheless, also the character of Suor Angela was cleverly built; she is ethical, cares for her friends, and takes very seriously her vocation, without ever forgetting about her difficult past; it is a character made to be loved by its audience. The plot of all episodes is very dynamic and articulated, with constants alternations of comedy and emotional events, without transforming it into a drama; furthermore the episodes are one independent from the other, so even if viewers miss one they don't get lost. Also the structure is very linear and easy to follow, and this is a quite uncommon characteristic for a Rai 1 broadcast scripted comedy with such a strong religious background.

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