

Religious leaders are enjoying increasing airtime on Italian television channels, a survey by the news magazine L'espresso suggests. And chief among them, naturally, is the Pope.

According to L'espresso's survey, the Catholic church's leading figure received a total of 29 minutes airtime between January 1st and May 10th this year, two-thirds of it on the main, state-run channel Rai and one-fifth on channels operated by Mediaset, the country's leading commercial operator, in which prime minister **Silvio Berlusconi** has a controlling interest.

Writer Klaus Davi puts it all down to the 'hidden strategy of the Vatican on Rai', adding that 'Berlusconi's strategy is leading the public service along an increasingly secular path'.

Berlusconi's Mediaset, on the other hand, is described as a 'super believer'. By affording religious leaders airtime, Rai may hope to preserve its influence at a time when its audiences are falling sharply, L'espresso says.

For the record, the top ten religious leaders on Italian TV over the first five months of this year were:

| | Leader | Airtime |
|-----|----------------------------|---------|
| 1. | The Pope | 29' 17" |
| 2. | Don Gianni Paget Bozzo | 16' 39" |
| 3. | Don Giuseppe Albanese | 13' 01" |
| 4. | Don Oreste Benzi | 12' 09" |
| 5. | Don Antonio Mazzi | 8' 48" |
| 6. | Don Gino Rigoldi | 4' 21" |
| 7. | Cardinale Severino Poletto | 4' 11" |
| 8. | Monsignor Angelo Comastri | 2' 58" |
| 9. | Cardinale Ersilio Tonini | 2' 51" |
| 10. | Don Fortunato di Noto | 2' 47" |

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