

## **Ordinary Priests. Local Religious Authorities in Eastern Slovakia and the Holocaust**

“And then, looking for an explanation, people came to the rectory asking, ‘Why is this happening, father?’ or ‘Pastor, what is going on, what does this mean?’ And he explained it to them,” recalled Anna Alžbeta Gulovichová the crucial role her father, Greek Catholic Priest Edmund Gulovich, had in making sense of the 1942 deportations of Jews from Slovakia for the local population.

Research on the Holocaust in Slovakia, and the flirtation of clerics with fascism, has so far focused on the highest echelons of the regime *and* church, most notably on Jozef Tiso, president of the 1939–45 republic and a Roman Catholic priest. In his dual capacity of a secular and religious leader, Tiso used biblical references to enable the persecution of Slovakian Jews. In a country where the Catholic Church enjoyed a strong position, with a population that predominantly identified with one of the Christian churches, the role of priests and pastors exceeded their formally proscribed duties. In this sense, Tiso was *only* one of many clerics who, in one way or the other, facilitated the Holocaust in Slovakia by religiously justifying it.

My paper looks into the many previously unknown local priests – Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Protestant – in the former Šariš Zemplín County, eastern Slovakia, during World War II. Historically, the multiethnic vibe of the borderland region went hand in hand with religious pluralism, demonstrated by the fact that a Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Protestant church and a Jewish temple was often only a walking from of each other. By examining newly available parish archives, memoirs and witness testimonies, including with family members of religious leaders from the region, my paper sheds new light on the complicity of “ordinary priests” in the Holocaust.