B. APOCALYPTICISM
“Beginnings are for the most part hidden. This also applies to the beginnings of Christianity after Easter.” So began the article that Ernst Käsemann published in 1960, which unleashed the polemic reflected in the question used here as a title. In that article, which had the title “The beginnings of Christian theology” and in the articles which Käsemann felt obliged to write in order to clarify his thought in view of the reactions it caused, he tried to unravel the mystery of the origins of Christian theology; to discover the roots of the tree with fruits of many kinds that the New Testament exhibits and to find the fertile ground whose vitality feeds the roots of this tree and allows it to give such a variety of fruits. Käsemann’s reply was clear and straight to the point: the generative womb of all Christian theology was apocalyptic: “Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology—since we cannot really class the preaching of Jesus as theology.”

The purpose of this conference, almost thirty years after the publication of the original article, is to re-examine the problem once again in


4 The article was republished in 1964, together with other writings by Käsemann on the topic, in his work Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen II (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1964), 83–104; it was translated into English with the title “The Beginnings of Christian Theology,” in New Testament Questions of Today (New Testament Library; London: SCM Press, 1969), 82–107, and included in a special number of the Journal of Theology and Church, edited by R.W. Funk, with the title “Apocalyptic,” JTC 6 (1969), together with the more important contributions to the dossier, such as the articles by G. Ebeling and E. Fuchs to which we will refer below. Unfortunately, this special number of the JTC, which besides the articles mentioned also contains important studies on the topic by O. Betz and the editor, Funk, is not available to me. I was able to use the study by W.G. Rollins, “The New Testament and Apocalyptic,” VTS 17 (1970–71):