Rossetti’s next work of devotional prose, *Called to Be Saints*, although not published until 1881 was written before 1876, following close on the heels of *Annus Domini*. There is much similarity in their underlying theological understanding, and in it we can see Rossetti continue to construct her own theological models. As a development of the naming activity of the earlier volume, Rossetti takes biblical characters for development, choosing ‘the nineteen saints commemorated by name in our Book of Common Prayer, with the Holy Innocents neither named nor numbered, with St. Michael and his cloud of All Angels, with All Saints’ (from the section entitled ‘The Key to my Book’, p. xiii). With due regard for the inspired text and its sacred associations, which flow in and out through the margins of the text as a mirror to her discourse, Rossetti paints a portrait of Christ’s friends as social beings: living, loving, teaching and, ultimately, reversing the process of suffering and death through identification with the life-giving power of Christ.

This parable of human endeavour and triumph is interpreted and held together by a close relationship with the rest of physical creation, itself given meaning by the event of Christ, the fulfilment of wisdom, the divine creative principle which draws all to God. Each saint is linked to a semi-precious stone and a wild flower, illustrated and described in botanical detail. This not only serves as an emblem or
analogy, but becomes a miniature world parallel to our own, touching and teaching us, hinting at powers and virtues half-understood and now forgotten. Rossetti has come far from the barrenness of a religion of negation and denial; rejecting the sterility which she identifies with ‘vanity of vanities’ she has embraced the virtues of life-giving wisdom.

In *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti*, Kent and Stanwood describe the volume as ‘a particularly splendid example’ of Tractarian publishing,¹ and this is true not only of the beautiful binding and illustrations, but also of its vision of divine wisdom at the heart of a universe rich in analogy and symbol.

Wisdom is at the centre of much of the Tractarian enterprise; central to Keble’s sacramental universe, for example, is St. Augustine’s explanation of wisdom’s appeal to the soul through the senses:

> Consider whether this be not what is written concerning wisdom; ‘she will show herself to them cheerfully in the way, and meet them with every kind of Providence:’ i.e. which ever way thou turnest thyself, she speaks to thee by certain traces which she hath impressed upon her works, and when thou slippest back to external things, recalls thee by the very forms of those external things. So that whatsoever delights thee in the body, and allures thee by the bodily senses, thou mayest perceive to be according to certain numbers; and inquiring its origin, mayest return into thyself, and understand that whatever reaches thee by the bodily senses, cannot be to thee an object of approbation or the contrary, except thou hast within thee certain laws of beauty to which thou mayest refer whatever seems outwardly fair to thee.²

For Isaac Williams also, ‘hidden wisdom’ shines forth from parable, analogy and from ‘dark and difficult sayings, conveying instruction by a kind of metaphor, or similitude’.³ He quotes Proverbs, ‘Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city she uttereth her words’,⁴ and is careful to make explicit the link between wisdom and the life-force presented in Christ, who was ‘Wisdom itself’.

But where Keble and Williams cautiously approach nature’s abundance, hurrying on to Keble’s ‘Poetical, Moral and Mystical phases or aspects of this visible world … considered the one great and effectual safeguard against such idolising of the material world’,⁵ Rossetti