For Libermann, privative self-denial protects and nurtures sweetness \[douceur\]. It accepts the privations occurring in daily life (which he calls “providential”). His missionaries will have enough suffering without looking for it in bodily self-affliction. He presupposes God is actively engaged in bringing everything that is happening into such a harmonious interplay to achieve his purposes in creating and redeeming. Divine Providence runs things sweetly and effectively. We have no control over this “sweet and effective” action of Providence, but are players in the game, consciously or unconsciously, because our decisions and actions are taken up into this divine plan. For our own good, we can be a contributor and enjoy a glimpse of how nicely things turn out in the long run. This means waiting for the right time to do something or recognizing the right time in what is happening around us.

Libermann waited confidently for the signs and actions of God’s moment. It seems to me that anyone ... who counts on his own forces can be stopped before an obstacle; but when one counts on our adorable Master alone, what difficulty need be feared? We stop only when there is a wall in front of us, waiting patiently and confidently until there is an opening, then we pass through as if nothing had happened.

Libermann was conscious that his plans never turned out the way he expected, that divine Providence brought about results that exceeded his hopes. His confidant, Frédéric Levavasseur, wrote:

...our dear Father took great pains to wait for the moment of God when he had some good work to do. He was not slow to act when it was necessary, but he knew how to wait a long time for indications of the will of God and his moments; this dependence on the conduct of God, this fidelity to observe his moments, he carried over to the least circumstance (ND 1.339-331).
Waiting for God’s moment appears frequently in Libermann’s recommendations regarding apostolic work. He knew how to wait for things to mature before making decisions and taking action. He excelled in discerning this “moment” when dealing with his missionaries in Africa, despite having to wait months, sometimes many months, for events to gel and personnel to measure up to his expectations.

The word “moment” appears for the first time in his Rennes’ correspondence (1837-39) when apparent lack of success, feelings of uselessness, re-emerging epileptic seizures, and perhaps, unexplainable to him, absence of God ravaged his physical and emotional being. He had nothing to rely on except God who would act only in his own time. This could explain why from then on “waiting for God’s moment” occurs increasingly in his letters until the end of his life.

Libermann often referred to the divine management of affairs in Wisdom 8:1, “Attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter” (which he translated, “La Sagesse atteint avec force d’un bout a l’autre, et dispose tout avec douceur” – wisdom reaches with force from one end to the other and disposes everything sweetly). He saw this passage as biblical justification for his exhortations to nurture sweetness [douceur] interiorly and exteriorly, so that the Spirit can operate more easily within the personand that apostolic action proceed effectively in imitation of Jesus. The missionary is not discouraged by lack of success or emotional satisfaction in his prayer or absence of human comfort.

19[I heavily abridged this section; readers very interested in this topic may want to consult the original. Editor].
20LS 2.476, Aug 1840, to E. Dupont, seminarian; ND 2.171.
21Authors consider the Rennes experience (July 1837- Dec 1839) pivotal in his spiritual development. The excruciating desolation and sense of personal uselessness and failure echoed the classic experience of “the dark night of the soul” so impressively described by John of the Cross.